

CC 02988

\$4.50

THE BEST OF **OMNI** SCIENCE FICTION NO. 4

**COLLECTOR'S
EDITION**

**FIRST
PUBLICATION OF
SPIDER ROBINSON'S
"RUBBER SOUL"**

**PLUS 19 OTHER
NEW STORIES
AND SF
MASTERPIECES**

FEATURING

**ROBERT SILVERBERG
GREGORY BENFORD
ORSON SCOTT CARD
ALFRED BESTER
STANISLAW LEM**

**EDITED BY
BEN BOVA AND
DON MYRUS**

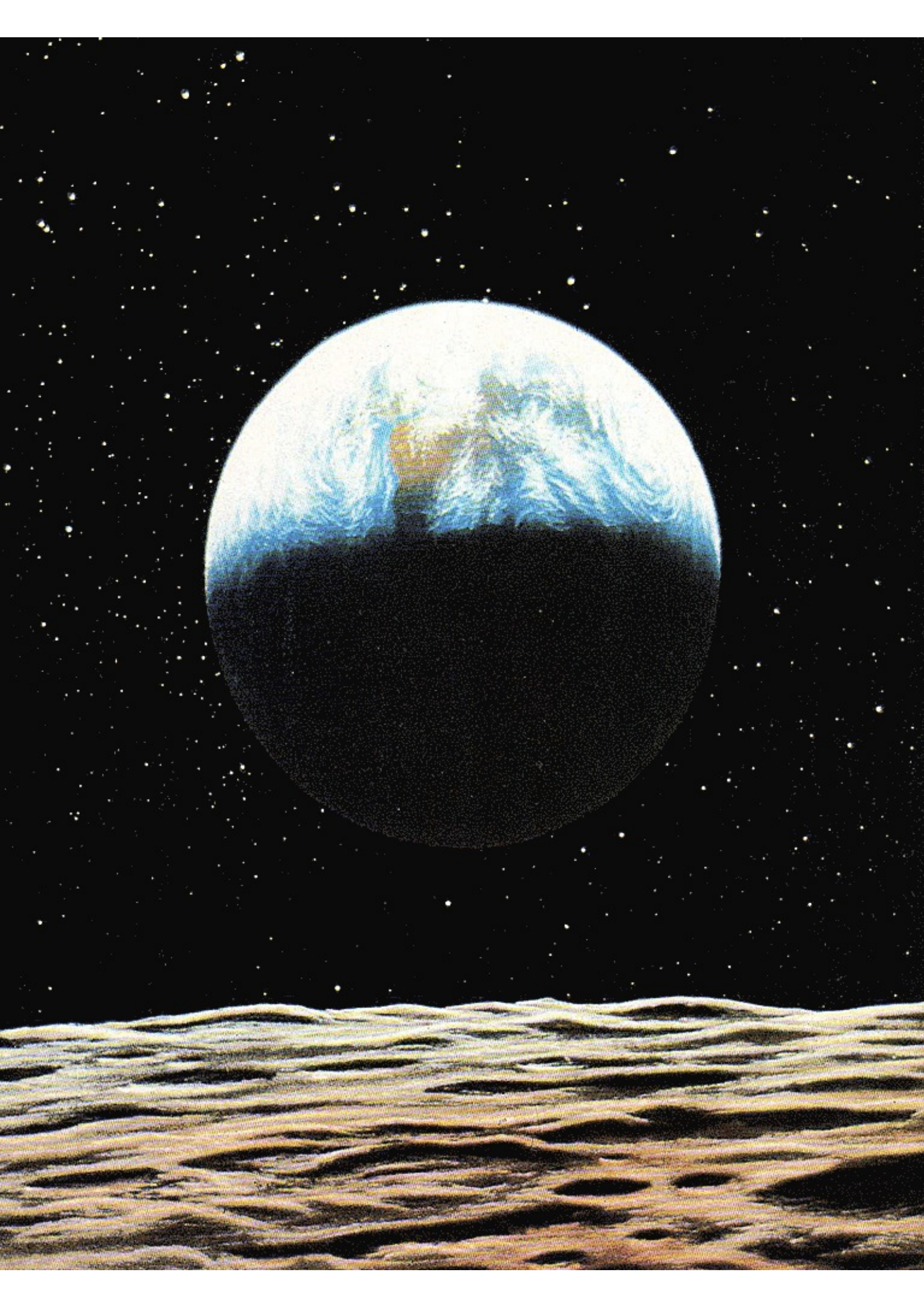


THE BEST OF **Omni** SCIENCE FICTION NO. 4

Three never-before-published stories and two science fiction classics are included among the contents of this, the fourth in a very popular and widely-selling series. The volume is organized into five sections and is illustrated throughout with artwork that has earned for *Omni* magazine a reputation for superlative graphics. Two of the sections consist of outstanding stories and pictorials originally published in *Omni*. The section titled "An Orson Scott Card Celebration" gives due recognition to an author fre-

quently published in *Omni* and believed by the editors of this anthology to possess an extraordinary and still-unfolding talent. The section of SF originals is highlighted by Spider Robinson's story "Rubber Soul"—a new kind of science fiction in which the return of a martyred rock superstar puts right certain celebrated relationships. The science fiction classics section is comprised of a renowned story by Alfred Bester and one by Brian W. Aldiss, each a giant of the genre and each proudly presented here.

EDITED BY BEN BOVA AND DON MYRUS



THE BEST OF **OMNI** SCIENCE FICTION NO. 4

Special editorial services for this book were provided by Aaron Norman and Betsy Vayda; special design by Richard Blerweiss.

Acknowledgments: Paintings for "Dreamtime" pictorial by Gervasio Gallardo (pages 12-13, pages 14-15, page 17 left, page 19), Lemuel Line (page 14, page 16, page 18), and Carlos Ochagavia (page 17) • Painting (page 44): "Man Eating Oranges" by Fernando Botero. Foto: Galerie Brusberg, Hannover • "Return from the Stars" reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. and by Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd. in the U.K., the British Commonwealth and certain contiguous territories, from *Return from the Stars* by Stanislaw Lem. Copyright © 1961. English translation copyright © 1980 by Stanislaw Lem • "The Last Jerry Fagin Show" reprinted by permission of the author and his agent, Curtis Brown Associates Ltd. Copyright © 1980 by John Morressy • "Eastern Exposures" pictorial published with the cooperation of Japan Creators' Association.

Copyright © 1982 by Omni Publications International Ltd., 909 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. All rights reserved. Nothing may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the publisher. Published simultaneously in the United States of America and in Canada. First edition. Printed in the United States of America by Meredith Printing Corporation and distributed in the U.S.A., Canada, U.S. territorial possessions and the world (except the U.K.) by Curtis Circulation Company, 21 Henderson Drive, West Caldwell, N.J. 07006. Distributed in the U.K. by Comag Ltd., Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex, UB7 7QE, England. Certain of the materials contained herein were previously published in *Omni* and were copyrighted 1978 to 1982 inclusive by Omni Publications International Ltd. *Omni* is the registered trademark of Omni Publications International Ltd. The editor, publisher and design director of *Omni* is Bob Guccione; the president is Kathy Keeton.

COVER: PAINTING BY MICHAEL R. WHELAN
FACING PAGE: PAINTING BY DON DIXON

OMNI ENCORE/PART ONE

- 6 OUR LADY OF THE SAUROPODS by Robert Silverberg
- 12 DREAMTIME *Pictorial* Paintings by various artists
- 20 MARCHIANNA by Kevin O'Donnell, Jr.
- 24 DARK SANCTUARY by Gregory Benford
- 29 SIGMUND IN SPACE by Barry N. Malzberg
- 32 LIGHT VOYAGER *Pictorial* Paintings by John Berkey
- 38 VALLEY OF THE KILNS by James B. Hall

AN ORSON SCOTT CARD CELEBRATION

- 44 FAT FARM
- 49 QUIETUS
- 54 ST. AMY'S TALE
- 62 DEEP-BREATHING EXERCISES
- 66 NOBLE SAVAGE *Pictorial* Paintings by Boris Vallejo

SCIENCE FICTION ORIGINALS

- 74 RUBBER SOUL by Spider Robinson
- 78 I AM LARGE, I CONTAIN MULTITUDES by Melisa Michaels
- 80 LOVE CALLS by Oxford Williams

SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS

- 88 FONDLY FAHRENHEIT by Alfred Bester
- 96 MY LADY OF THE PSYCHIATRIC SORROWS by Brian W. Aldiss

OMNI ENCORE/PART TWO

- 102 OUT OF LUCK by Walter Tevis
- 108 RETURN FROM THE STARS by Stanislaw Lem
- 114 TRANSFORMATIONS *Pictorial* Paintings by Bob Venosa and Marshall Arisman
- 118 THE PRESIDENT'S IMAGE by Stephen Robinett
- 121 FUTURE BOOKS by Cynthia Darnell
- 122 SOUL SEARCH by Spider Robinson
- 127 SAVE THE TOAD! by Norman Spinrad
- 128 GIANT ON THE BEACH by John Keefauver
- 131 STRIKE! by Isaac Asimov
- 132 THE LAST JERRY FAGIN SHOW by John Morressy
- 138 EASTERN EXPOSURES *Pictorial* Paintings by various artists

OMNI
ENCORE
PART
ONE

In "Our Lady of the Sauropods," Robert Silverberg certainly makes you wonder if all those huge reptiles of the Mesozoic have not been misapprehended by science. The creatures in Silverberg's bestiary are at once beguiling and appallingly sinister. After reading this one, you may never again view the bones of extinct saurians with quite the same equanimity.

As a good short story often does, "Marchianna" closes with a clever twist. Author Kevin O'Donnell, Jr. has named the story after its heroine, a "female" automaton. Marchianna and her master, Nakamura-san, are aboard a mining craft in the asteroid belt. Marchianna wants only to please Nakamura-san. Having been brilliantly programmed, she caters to his every need except the one he desperately requires and she cannot provide. But Marchianna has a prodigious surprise up her kimono sleeve.

Also set among the asteroids, Gregory Benford's story, "Dark Sanctuary," tells of a lone prospector who narrowly outruns mysterious interlopers. The chase is breathtaking, but logic and shrewd insight count for more than piloting skill in the prospector's deliverance. In "Sigmund in Space" by Barry N. Malzberg, a reconstruct of the great Dr. Freud is called upon to cope with epidemic paranoia aboard a starship. Malzberg's message, perhaps, is that humankind may someday depart the solar system but the seeds of psychosis will ever be among our baggage.

Escape from a regimented society of hard labor is the central theme of James B. Hall's grim tale, "Valley of the Kilns." A man and a woman, driven by an instinctual yearning for freedom, rebel against their oppressors and flee to the forest. It turns out to be a vain and tragic endeavor. They are ill-prepared to survive in the wilderness. Hall's chilling implication is that the time may be coming when people will have to conform or perish.





Death was waiting among the dinosaurs—until she found a purpose for her life

OUR LADY OF THE SAUROPODS

BY ROBERT SILVERBERG

21 August, 0750 hours. Ten minutes since the module meltdown. I can't see the wreckage from here, but I can smell it, bitter and sour against the moist tropical air. I've found a cleft in the rocks, a kind of shallow cavern, where I'll be safe from the dinosaurs for a while. It's shielded by thick clumps of cycads, and in any case it's too small for the big predators to enter. But sooner or later I'm going to need food, and then what? I have no weapons. How long can one woman last, stranded and more or less helpless, aboard Dino Island, a habitat unit not quite fifteen hundred meters in diameter that she's sharing with a bunch of active, hungry dinosaurs?

I keep telling myself that none of this is really happening. Only I can't quite convince myself of this.

My escape still has me shaky. I can't get out of my mind the funny little bubbling sound the tiny powerpak made as it began to overheat. In something like fourteen seconds my lovely mobile module became a charred heap of fused-together junk, taking with it my communicator unit, my food supply, my laser gun, and just about everything else. But for the warning that funny little sound gave me, I'd be so much charred junk, too. Better off that way, most likely.

When I close my eyes, I imagine I can see Habitat Vronsky floating serenely in orbit a mere one hundred twenty kilometers away. What a beautiful sight! The walls gleaming like platinum, the great mirror collecting sunlight and flashing it into the windows, the agricultural satellites wheeling around it like a dozen tiny moons. I could almost reach out and touch it. Tap on the shielding and murmur, "Help me, come for me, rescue me." But I might just as well be out beyond Neptune as sitting here in the adjoining Lagrange slot. There's no way I can call for help. The moment I move outside this protective cleft in the rock I'm at the mercy of my saurians, and their mercy is not likely to be tender.

Now it's beginning to rain—artificial, like practically everything

PAINTING BY FRANK FRAZETTA

else on Dino Island. But it gets you just as wet as the natural kind. And just as clammy. Pfauh.

Jesus, what am I going to do?

0815 hours. The rain is over for now. It'll come again in six hours. Astonishing how muggy, dank, thick the air is. Simply breathing is hard work, and I feel as though mildew is forming on my lungs. I miss Vronsky's clear, crisp, everlasting springtime air. On previous trips to Dino Island I never cared about the climate. But of course I was snugly englobed in my mobile unit, a world within a world, self-contained, self-sufficient, isolated from all contact with this place and its creatures. Merely a roving eye, traveling as I pleased, invisible, invulnerable. Can they sniff me in here?

We don't think their sense of smell is very acute. And the stink of the burned wreckage dominates the place at the moment. But I must reek with fear signals. I feel calm now, but it was different when I got out of the module. Scattered pheromones all over the place, I bet.

Commotion in the cycads. *Something's coming in here!* Long neck, small birdlike feet, delicate grasping hands. Not to worry. *Struthiomimus*, is all—dainty dino, fragile, birdlike critter barely two meters high. Liquid golden eyes staring solemnly at me. It swivels its head from side to side, ostrichlike, click-click, as if trying to make up its mind about coming closer to me. *Scat!* Go peck a stegosaurus. Let me alone.

It withdraws, making little clucking sounds. Closest I've ever been to a live dinosaur. Glad it was one of the little ones.

0900 hours. Getting hungry. What am I going to eat?

They say roasted cycad cones aren't too bad. How about raw ones? So many plants are edible when cooked and poisonous otherwise. I never studied such things in detail. Living in our antiseptic little L5 habitats, we're not required to be outdoors-wise, after all. Anyway, there's a fleshy-looking cone on the cycad just in front of the cleft, and it's got an edible look. Might as well try it raw, because there's no other way. Rubbing sticks together will get me nowhere.

Getting the cone off takes some work. Wiggle, twist, snap, tear—*there*. Not as fleshy as it looks. Chewy, in fact. It's a little like munching on rubber. Decent flavor, though. And maybe some useful carbohydrate.

The shuttle isn't due to pick me up for thirty days. Nobody's apt to come looking for me, or even to think about me, before then. I'm on my own. Nice irony there: I was desperate to get out of Vronsky and escape from all the bickering and maneuvering, the endless meetings and memoranda, the feinting and counterfeinting, all the ugly political crap that scientists indulge in when they turn into administrators. Thirty days of blessed isolation on Dino Island! An end to that constant dull throbbing in my

head from the daily infighting with Director Sarber. Pure research again! And then the meltdown, and here I am cowering in the bushes, wondering which comes first, starving or getting gobbled by some cloned tyrannosaurus.

0930 hours. Funny thought just now. Could it have been sabotage?

Consider. Sarber and I, feuding for weeks over the issue of opening Dino Island to tourists. Crucial staff vote coming up next month. Sarber says we can raise millions a year for expanded studies with a program of guided tours and perhaps some rental of the island to film companies. I say that's risky for the dinos and for the tourists, destructive of scientific values, a distraction, a sellout. Emotionally the staff's with me, but Sarber waves figures around, shows fancy income projections, and generally shouts and blusters. Tempers running high, Sarber in lethal fury at being opposed, barely able to hide his loathing

*● I'm a quick-witted
higher primate. If my humble
mammalian ancestors
were able to elude dinosaurs
well enough to inherit
the earth, I should be able
to keep from getting
eaten for . . . thirty days. ●*

for me. Circulating rumors—designed to get back to me—that if I persist in blocking him, he'll abort my career. Which is malarkey, of course. He may outrank me, but he has no real authority over me. And then his politeness yesterday. (Yesterday? An eon ago!) Smiling smarmily, telling me he hopes I'll rethink my position during my observation tour on the island. Wishing me well. Had he gimmicked my powerpak? I guess it isn't hard, if you know a little engineering, and Sarber does. Some kind of timer set to withdraw the insulator rods? Wouldn't be any harm to Dino Island itself, just a quick, compact, localized disaster that implodes and melts the unit and its passenger. So sorry, terrible scientific tragedy, what a great loss! And even if by some fluke I got out of the unit in time, my chances of surviving here as a pedestrian for thirty days would be pretty skimpy, right? Right.

It makes me boil to think that someone would be willing to murder you over a mere policy disagreement. It's barbaric. Worse than that, it's tacky.

1130 hours. I can't stay crouched in this cleft forever. I'm going to explore Dino Is-

land and see if I can find a better hideout. This one simply isn't adequate for anything more than short-term huddling. Besides, I'm not as spooked as I was right after the meltdown. I realize now that I'm not going to find a tyrannosaurus hiding behind every tree. And even if I do, tyrannosaurs aren't going to be much interested in scrawny stuff like me.

Anyway, I'm a quick-witted higher primate. If my humble mammalian ancestors seventy million years ago were able to elude dinosaurs well enough to survive and inherit the earth, I should be able to keep from getting eaten for the next thirty days. And, with or without my cozy little mobile module, I want to get out into this place, whatever the risks. Nobody's ever had a chance to interact this closely with the dinos before.

Good thing I kept this pocket recorder when I jumped from the module. Whether I'm a dino's dinner or not, I ought to be able to set down some useful observations.

1830 hours. Twilight is descending now. I am camped near the equator in a lean-to flung together out of tree-fern fronds—a flimsy shelter—but the huge fronds conceal me, and with luck I'll make it through to morning. That cycad cone doesn't seem to have poisoned me yet, and I ate another one just now, along with some tender new fiddleheads uncoiling from the heart of a tree fern. Spartan fare, but it gives me the illusion of being fed.

In the evening mists I observe a brachiosaur, half-grown but already colossal, munching in the treetops. A gloomy-looking triceratops stands nearby, and several of the ostrichlike *struthiomimids* scamper busily in the underbrush, hunting I know not what. No sign of tyrannosaurs all day. There aren't many of them here, anyway, and I hope they're all sleeping off huge feasts somewhere in the other hemisphere.

What a fantastic place this is!

I don't feel tired. I don't even feel frightened—just a little wary.

I feel exhilarated, as a matter of fact.

Here I sit, peering out between fern fronds at a scene out of the dawn of time.

What a brilliant idea it was to put all the Olsen-process dinosaur reconstructions aboard a little L5 habitat of their very own and turn them loose to re-create the Mesozoic! After that unfortunate San Diego event with the tyrannosaurus it became politically unfeasible to keep them anywhere on Earth, I know, but, even so, this is a better scheme. In just a little more than seven years Dino Island has taken on an altogether convincing illusion of reality. Things grow so fast in this lush, steamy, high-CO₂ tropical atmosphere! Of course we haven't been able to duplicate the real Mesozoic flora, but we've done all right using botanical survivors, cycads and tree ferns and horsetails and palms and ginkgos and araucarias, and thick carpets of mosses and selaginellas and liverworts covering the ground. Everything has

blended and merged and run amok. It's hard now to recall the bare and unnatural look of the island when we first laid it out. Now it's a seamless tapestry in green and brown, a dense jungle broken only by streams, lakes, and meadows, encapsulated in spherical metal walls some five kilometers in circumference.

And the animals, the wonderful, fantastic, grotesque animals.

We don't pretend that the real Mesozoic ever held any such mix of fauna as I've seen today, stegosaurs and corythosaurs side by side, a triceratops sourly glaring at a brachiosaur, struthiomimus contemporary with iguanodon, a wild unscientific jumble of Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous, a hundred million years of the dinosaur reign scrambled together. We take what we can get. Olsen-process reconstructs require sufficient fossil DNA to permit the computer synthesis, and we've been able to find that in only some twenty species so far. The wonder is that we've accomplished even that much: to replicate the complete DNA molecule from battered and sketchy genetic information millions of years old, to carry out the intricate implants in reptilian host ova, to see the embryos through to self-sustaining levels. The only word that applies is *miraculous*. If our dinos come from eras millions of years apart, so be it: We do our best. If we have no pterosaur and no allosaur and no archaopteryx, so be it: We may have them yet. What we already have is plenty to work with. Someday there may be separate Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous satellite habitats, but none of us will live to see that, I suspect.

Total darkness now. Mysterious screechings and hissings out there. This afternoon, as I moved cautiously but in delight from the wreckage site up near the rotation axis to my present equatorial camp, sometimes coming within fifty or a hundred meters of living dinos, I felt a kind of ecstasy. Now my fears are returning, and my anger at this stupid marooning. I imagine clutching claws reaching for me, terrible jaws yawning above me.

I don't think I'll get much sleep tonight.

22 August. 0600 hours. Rosy-fingered dawn comes to Dino Island, and I'm still alive. Not a great night's sleep, but I must have had some, because I can remember fragments of dreams. About dinosaurs, naturally. Sitting in little groups, some playing pinocchio and some knitting sweaters. And choral singing, a dinosaur rendition of *The Messiah* or Beethoven's Ninth, I don't remember which. I think I'm going nuts.

I feel alert, inquisitive, and hungry. Especially hungry. I know we've stocked this place with frogs and turtles and other small-size anachronisms to provide a balanced diet for the big critters. Today I'll have to snare some for myself, grisly though I find the prospect of eating raw frog's legs.

I don't bother getting dressed anymore.

With rain showers programmed to fall four times a day, it's better to go naked anyway. Mother Eve of the Mesozoic, that's me! And without my soggy tunic I find that I don't mind the greenhouse atmosphere of the habitat half as much as I did.

Out to see what I can find.

The dinosaurs are up and about already, the big herbivores munching away, the carnivores doing their stalking. All of them have such huge appetites that they can't wait for the sun to come up. In the bad old days when the dinos were thought to be reptiles, of course, we'd have expected them to sit there like lumps until daylight got their body temperatures up to functional levels. But one of the great joys of the reconstruct project was the vindication of the notion that dinosaurs were warm-blooded animals, active and quick and pretty damned intelligent. No sluggardly crocodilians, these! Would that they were, if only for my survival's sake.

1130 hours. A busy morning. My first encounter with a major predator.

There are nine tyrannosaurs on the island, including three born in the past eighteen months. (That gives us an optimum predator-to-prey ratio. If the tyrannosaurs keep reproducing and don't start eating each other, we'll have to begin thinning them out. One of the problems with a closed ecology—natural checks and balances don't fully apply.) Sooner or later I was bound to encounter one, but I had hoped it would be later.

I was hunting frogs at the edge of Cope Lake. A ticklish business: calls for agility, cunning, quick reflexes. I remember the technique from my girlhood—the cupped hand, the lightning pounce—but somehow it's become a lot harder in the last twenty years. Superior frogs these days, I suppose. There I was kneeling in the mud, swooping, missing, swooping, missing; some vast sauropod snoozing in the lake, probably our *diplodocus*; a corythosaur browsing in a stand of ginkgo trees, quite delicately nipping off the foul-smelling yellow fruits. Swoop. Miss. Swoop. Miss. Such intense concentration on my task that old T. rex could have tiptoed right up behind me and I'd never have noticed. But then I felt a subtle something, a change in the air, maybe, a barely perceptible shift in dynamics. I glanced up and saw the corythosaur rearing on its hind legs, looking around uneasily, pulling deep sniffs into that fantastically elaborate bony crest that houses its early-warning system. *Carnivore alert!* The corythosaur obviously smelled something wicked this way coming, for it swung around between two big ginkgos and started to go galumphing away. Too late. The treetops parted, giant boughs toppled, and out of the forest came our original tyrannosaur, the pigeon-toed one we call Belshazzar, moving in its heavy, clumsy waddle, ponderous legs working hard, tail absurdly swinging from side to side. I slithered into the lake and

scrunched down as deep as I could go in the warm, oozing mud. The corythosaur had no place to slither. Unarmed, unarmed, it could only make great bleating sounds, terror mingled with defiance, as the killer bore down on it.

I had to watch, I had never actually seen a kill before.

In a graceless but wondrously effective way the tyrannosaur dug its hind claws into the ground, pivoted astonishingly, and, using its massive tail as a counterweight, moved in a ninety-degree arc to knock the corythosaur down with a stupendous sidewise swat of its huge head. I hadn't been expecting that. The corythosaur dropped and lay on its side, snorting in pain and feebly waving its limbs. Now came the coup de grace with hind legs, and then the rending and tearing, the jaws and the tiny arms at last coming into play. Burrowing chin-deep in the mud, I watched in awe and weird fascination. There are those among us who argue that the carnivores ought to be segregated—put on their own island—that it is folly to allow reconstructs created with such effort to be casually butchered this way. Perhaps in the beginning that made sense, but not now, not when natural increase is rapidly filling the island with young dinos. If we are to learn anything about these animals, it will only be by reproducing as closely as possible their original living conditions. Besides, would it not be a cruel mockery to feed our tyrannosaurs on hamburger and herring?

The killer fed for more than an hour. At the end came a scary moment: Belshazzar, blood-smeared and bloated, hauled himself ponderously down to the edge of the lake for a drink. He stood no more than ten meters from me. I did my most convincing imitation of a rotting log, but the tyrannosaur, although it did seem to study me with a beady eye, had no further appetite. For a long while after he departed I stayed buried in the mud, fearing he might come back for dessert. And eventually there was another crashing and bashing in the forest—not Belshazzar this time, though, but a younger one with a gimpy arm. It uttered a sort of whinnying sound and went to work on the corythosaur carcass. No surprise: We already knew from our observations that tyrannosaurs had no prejudices against carrion.

Nor, I found, did I.

When the coast was clear, I crept out and saw that the two tyrannosaurs had left hundreds of kilos of meat. Starvation knoweth no pride and also few qualms. Using a clamshell for my blade, I started chopping away at the corythosaur.

Corythosaur meat has a curiously sweet flavor—nutmeg and cloves, dash of cinnamon. The first chunk would not go down. You are a pioneer, I told myself, retching. You are the first human ever to eat dinosaur meat. Yes, but why does it have to be raw? No choice about that. Be dispassionate, love. Conquer your gag reflex or die trying. I pretended I was eating oysters. This time

the meat went down. It didn't stay down. The alternative, I told myself grimly, is a diet of fern fronds and frogs, and you haven't been much good at catching the frogs. I tried again. Success!

I'd have to call corythosaur meat an acquired taste. But the wilderness is no place for picky eaters.

23 August, 1300 hours. At midday I found myself in the southern hemisphere, along the fringes of Marsh Marsh, about a hundred meters below the equator. Observing herd behavior in sauropods: five brachiosaurs, two adult and three young, moving in formation, the small ones in the center. By *small* I mean only some ten meters from nose to tail tip. Sauropod appetites being what they are, we'll have to thin that herd soon, too, especially if we want to introduce a female diplodocus into the colony. Two species of sauropods breeding and eating like that could devastate the island in three years. Nobody ever expected dinosaurs to reproduce like rabbits—another dividend of their being warm-blooded, I suppose. We might have guessed it, though, from the vast quantity of fossils. If that many bones survived the catastrophes of a hundred-odd million years, how enormous the living Mesozoic population must have been! An awesome race in more ways than their mere physical mass.

I had a chance to do a little herd thinning myself just now. Mysterious stirring in the spongy soil right at my feet, and I looked down to see triceratops eggs hatching. Seven brave little critters, already horny and beaky, scrabbling out of a nest, staring around defiantly. No bigger than kittens, but active and sturdy from the moment they were born.

The corythosaur meat has probably spoiled by now. A more pragmatic soul very likely would have augmented her diet with one or two little ceratopsians. I couldn't bring myself to do it.

They scuttled off in seven different directions, I thought briefly of catching one and making a pet out of it. Silly idea.

25 August, 0700 hours. Start of the fifth day. I've done three complete circumambulations of Dino Island. Slinking around on foot is fifty times as risky as cruising around in a module, and fifty thousand times as rewarding. I make camp in a different place every night. I don't mind the humidity any longer. And despite my skimpy diet I feel pretty healthy. Raw dinosaur, I know now, is a lot tastier than raw frog. I've become an expert scavenger—the sound of a tyrannosaur in the forest now stimulates my salivary glands instead of my adrenals. Going naked is fun, too. And I appreciate my body much more, since the bulges that civilization put there have begun to melt away.

Nevertheless, I keep trying to figure out some way of signaling Habitat Vronsky for help. Changing the position of the reflect-

ing mirrors, maybe, so I can beam an SOS? Sounds nice, but I don't even know where the island's controls are located, let alone how to run them. Let's hope my luck holds out another three and a half weeks.

27 August, 1700 hours. The dinosaurs know that I'm here and that I'm some extraordinary kind of animal. Does that sound weird? How can great dumb beasts know anything? They have such tiny brains. And my own brain must be softening on this protein-and-cellulose diet. Even so, I'm starting to have peculiar feelings about these animals. I see them *watching* me. An odd, knowing look in their eyes, not stupid at all. They stare, and I imagine them nodding, smiling, exchanging glances with each other, discussing me. I'm supposed to be observing them, but I think they're observing me, too, somehow.

No, that's just crazy. I'm tempted to erase the entry. But I suppose I'll leave it as a record of my changing psychological state, if nothing else.

28 August, 1200 hours. More fantasies about the dinosaurs. I've decided that the big brachiosaur—Bertha—plays a key role here. She doesn't move around much, but there are always lesser dinosaurs in orbit around her. Much eye contact. *Eye contact between dinosaurs?* Let it stand. That's my perception of what they're doing. I get a definite sense that there's communication going on here, modulating over some wave that I'm not capable of detecting. And Bertha seems to be a central nexus, a grand totem of some sort, a—switchboard? What am I talking about? What's happening to me?

30 August, 0945 hours. What a damned fool I am! Serves me right for being a filthy voyeur. Climbed a tree to watch iguanodons mating at the foot of Bakker Falls. At the climactic moment the branch broke. I dropped twenty meters. Grabbed a lower limb or I'd be dead now. As it is, pretty badly smashed around. I don't think anything's broken, but my left leg won't support me and my back's in bad shape. Internal injuries, too? Not sure. I've crawled into a little rock shelter near the falls. Exhausted and maybe feverish. Shock, most likely. I suppose I'll starve now. It would have been an honor to be eaten by a tyrannosaur, but to die from falling out of a tree is just plain humiliating.

The mating of iguanodons is a spectacular sight, by the way. But I hurt too much to describe it now.

31 August, 1700 hours. Stiff, sore, hungry, hideously thirsty. Leg still useless, and when I try to crawl even a few meters, I feel as if I'm going to crack in half at the waist. High fever.

How long does it take to starve to death?

1 September, 0700 hours. Three broken eggs lying near me when I awoke. Embryos

still alive—probably stegosaur—but not for long. First food in forty-eight hours. Did the eggs fall out of a nest somewhere overhead? Do stegosaurs make their nests in trees, dummy?

Fever diminishing. Body aches all over. Crawled to the stream and managed to scoop up a little water.

1330 hours. Dozed off. Awakened to find haunch of fresh meat within crawling distance. *Struthiomimus* drumstick, I think. Nasty sour taste, but it's edible. Nibbled a little, slept again, ate some more. Pair of stegosaurs grazing not far away, tiny eyes fastened on me. Smaller dinosaurs holding a kind of conference by some big cycads. And Bertha Brachiosaur is munching away in Ostrom Meadow, benignly supervising the whole scene.

This is absolutely crazy.

I think the dinosaurs are taking care of me. But why would they do that?

2 September, 0900 hours. No doubt of it at all. They bring me eggs, meat, even cycad cones and tree-fern fronds. At first they delivered things only when I slept, but now they come hopping right up to me and dump things at my feet. The *struthiomimids* are the bearers—they're the smallest, most agile, quickest hands. They bring their offerings, stare me right in the eye, pause as if waiting for a tip. Other dinosaurs watching from the distance. This is a coordinated effort. I am the center of all activity on the island, it seems. I imagine that even the tyrannosaurs are saving choice cuts for me. Hallucination? Fantasy? Delirium of fever? I feel lucid. The fever is abating. I'm still too stiff and weak to move very far, but I think I'm recovering from the effects of my fall. With a little help from my friends.

1000 hours. Played back the last entry. Thinking it over I don't think I've gone insane. If I'm sane enough to be worried about my sanity, how crazy can I be? Or am I just fooling myself? There's a terrible conflict between what I think I perceive going on here and what I know I ought to be perceiving.

1500 hours. A long, strange dream this afternoon. I saw all the dinosaurs standing in the meadow, and they were connected to one another by gleaming threads, like the telephone lines of olden times, and all the threads centered on Bertha. As if she's the switchboard, yes. And telepathic messages were traveling through her to the others. An extrasensory hookup, powerful pulses moving along the lines. I dreamed that a small dinosaur came to me and offered me a line and, in pantomime, showed me how to hook it up, and a great flood of delight went through me as I made the connection. And when I plugged it in, I could feel the deep and heavy thoughts of the dinosaurs, the slow, rapturous philosophical interchanges.

When I woke, the dream seemed bizarre-

ly vivid, strangely real, the dream ideas lingering as they sometimes do. I saw the animals about me in a new way. As if this is not just a zoological research station but a community, a settlement, the sole outpost of an alien civilization—an alien civilization native to Earth.

Come off it. These animals have minute brains. They spend their days chomping on greenery, except for the ones that chomp on other dinosaurs. Compared with dinosaurs, cows and sheep are downright geniuses. I can hobble a little now.

3 September, 0600 hours. The same dream again last night, the universal telepathic linkage. Sense of warmth and love flowing from dinosaurs to me.

And once more I found fresh tyrannosaur eggs for breakfast.

5 September, 1100 hours. I'm making a fast recovery. Up and about, still creaky, but not much pain left. They still feed me. Though the struthiomimids remain the bearers of food, the bigger dinosaurs now come close, too. A stegosaurus nuzzled up to me like some Goliath-sized pony, and I petted its rough, scaly flank. The diplodocus stretched out flat and seemed to beg me to stroke its immense neck.

If this is madness, so be it. There's a community here, loving and temperate. Even the predatory carnivores are part of it. Eaters and eaten are aspects of the whole, yin and yang. Riding around in our sealed modules, we could never have suspected any of this.

They are gradually drawing me into their communion. I feel the pulses that pass between them. My entire soul throbs with that strange new sensation. My skin tingles.

They bring me food of their own bodies, their flesh and their unborn young, and they watch over me and silently urge me back to health. Why? For sweet charity's sake? I don't think so. I think they want something from me. More than that. I think they need something from me.

What could they need from me?

6 September, 0600 hours. All this night I have moved slowly through the forest in what I can only term an ecstatic state. Vast shapes, humped, monstrous forms barely visible by dim glimmer, came and went about me. Hour after hour I walked unharmed, feeling the communion intensely. I wandered, barely aware of where I was, until at last, exhausted, I have come to rest here on this mossy carpet, and in the first light of dawn I see the giant form of the great brachiosaurus standing like a mountain on the far side of Owen River.

I am drawn to her. I could worship her. Through her vast body surge powerful currents. She is the amplifier. By her are we all connected. The holy mother of us all. From the enormous mass of her body emanate potent healing impulses.

I'll rest a little while. Then I'll cross the river to her.

0900 hours. We stand face to face. Her head is fifteen meters above mine. Her small eyes are unreadable. I trust her and I love her.

Lesser brachiosaurs have gathered behind her on the riverbank. Farther away are dinosaurs of half a dozen other species, immobile, silent.

I am humble in their presence. They are representatives of a dynamic, superior race, which but for a cruel cosmic accident would rule the earth to this day, and I am coming to revere them, to bear witness to their greatness.

Consider: They endured for a hundred forty million years in ever-renewing vigor. They met all evolutionary challenges, except the one of sudden and catastrophic climatic change, against which nothing could have protected them. They multiplied and proliferated and adapted, dominating land and sea and air, covering the globe. Our own trifling, contemptible ancestors were nothing next to them. Who

*• I am drawn to her. I
could worship her. Through
her vast body surge
powerful currents. She is
the amplifier. By her
are we all connected. The
holy mother. From her
emanate healing impulses. •*

knows what these dinosaurs might have achieved if that crashing asteroid had not blotted out their light? What a vast irony: millions of years of supremacy ended in a single generation by a chilling cloud of dust. But until then—the wonder, the grandeur...

Only beasts, you say? How can you be sure? We know just a shred of what the Mesozoic was really like, just a slice, literally the bare bones. The passage of a hundred million years can obliterate all traces of civilization. Suppose they had language, poetry, mythology, philosophy? Love, dreams, aspirations? No, you say, they were beasts, ponderous and stupid, that lived mindless, bestial lives. And I reply that we puny hairy ones have no right to impose our own values on them. The only kind of civilization we can understand is the one we have built. We imagine that our own trivial accomplishments are the determining case, that computers and spaceships and broiled sausages are such miracles that they place us at evolution's pinnacle. But now I know otherwise. Humans have done marvelous, even incredible, things, yes. But we would never have existed at all,

had this greatest of races been allowed to live to fulfill its destiny.

I feel the intense love radiating from the titan that looms above me. I feel the contact between our souls steadily strengthening and deepening.

The last barriers dissolve.

And I understand at last.

I am the chosen one. I am the vehicle. I am the bringer of rebirth, the beloved one, the necessary one. Our Lady of the Sauropods am I, the holy one, the prophetess, the priestess.

Is this madness? Then it is madness, and I embrace it.

Why have we small hairy creatures existed at all? I know now. It is so that through our technology we could make possible the return of the great ones. They perished unfairly. Through us, they are resurrected aboard this tiny globe in space.

I tremble in the force of the need that pours from them.

I will not fail you, I tell the great sauro-pods before me, and the sauro-pods send my thoughts reverberating to all the others.

20 September, 0600 hours. The thirtieth day. The shuttle comes from Habitat Vronsky today to pick me up and deliver the next researcher.

I wait at the transit lock. Hundreds of dinosaurs wait with me, each close beside the next, both the lions and the lambs, gathered quietly, their attention focused entirely on me.

Now the shuttle arrives, right on time, gliding in for a perfect docking. The airlocks open. A figure appears. Sarber himself! Coming to make sure I didn't survive the meltdown, or else to finish me off.

He stands blinking in the entry passage, gaping at the throngs of placid dinosaurs arrayed in a huge semicircle around the naked woman who stands beside the wreckage of the mobile module. For a moment he is unable to speak.

"Anne?" he says finally. "What in God's name—"

"You'll never understand," I tell him. I give the signal. Belshazzar rumbles forward. Sarber screams and whirls and sprints for the airlock, but a stegosaurus blocks the way.

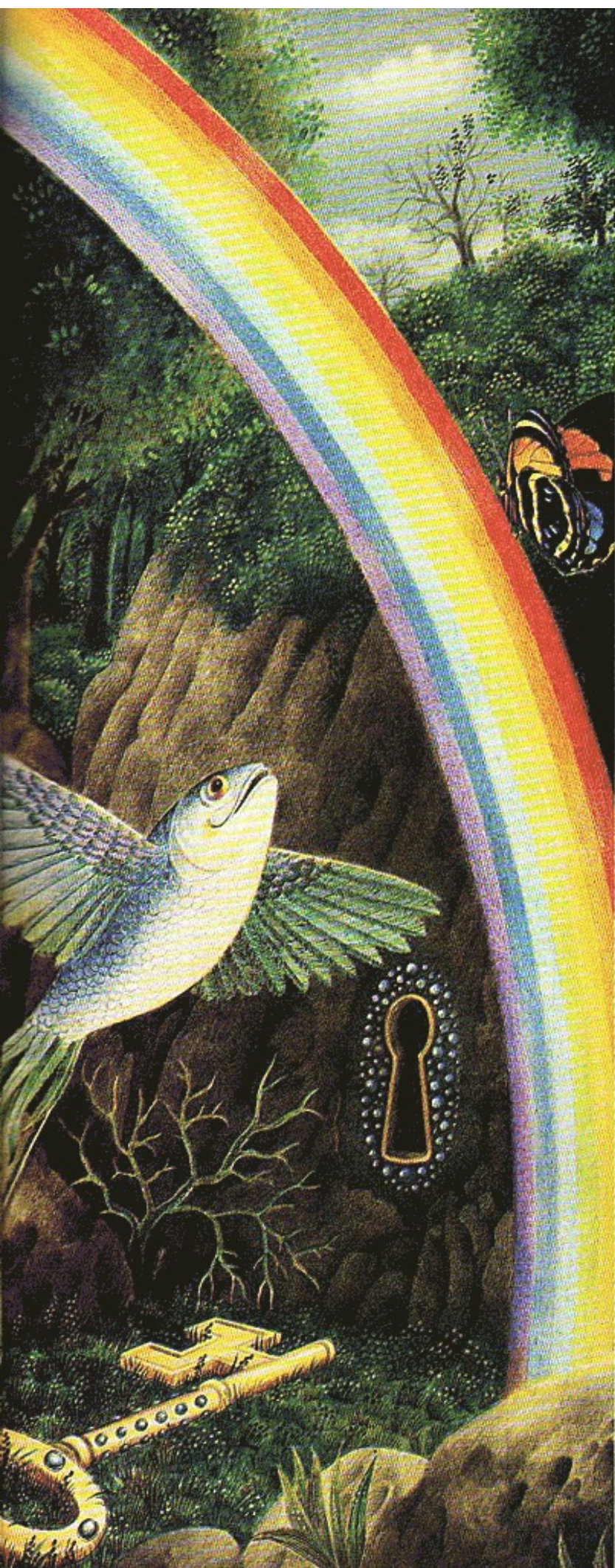
"No!" Sarber cries as the tyrannosaur's mighty head swoops down. It is all over in a moment.

Revenge! How sweet!

And this is only the beginning. Habitat Vronsky lies just one hundred twenty kilometers away. Elsewhere in the Lagrange belt are hundreds of other habitats ripe for conquest. The earth itself is within easy reach. I have no idea yet how it will be accomplished, but I know it will be done, and done successfully, and I will be the instrument by which it is done.

I stretch forth my arms to the mighty creatures that surround me. I feel their strength, their power, their harmony. I am one with them, and they with me. The Great Race has returned, and I am its priestess. Let the small hairy ones tremble!





*An encounter with one who has
visited more worlds than any of the
other survivors of his species*

DREAMTIME

BY AARON NORMAN

They call me Eldest. I am the most aged that survives of my species. My native sun system was destroyed eons ago, long after my celebrated departure from its joy-giving beauties and comforts. A poet compared my departure to that of a godlike babe, the first of a new breed, bounding from the womb.

Do you understand what I am saying? I am not versed in your language yet.

Occasionally, perhaps every few hundred of your millenia or so, I have chanced to encounter one or another of my kind during realtime surveys. Thousands—I don't know how many, of course—departed later than I, but I was the first and I am the oldest, as they duly acknowledge when we interact. It is good to exchange data with them, to compare our realtime experiences and to recall the sublimely awesome unrealities we have each explored in dreamtime.

You reveal puzzlement. Alas, it is difficult to convey my full meaning within the confines of your little language. Try and you may understand most of what I tell you.

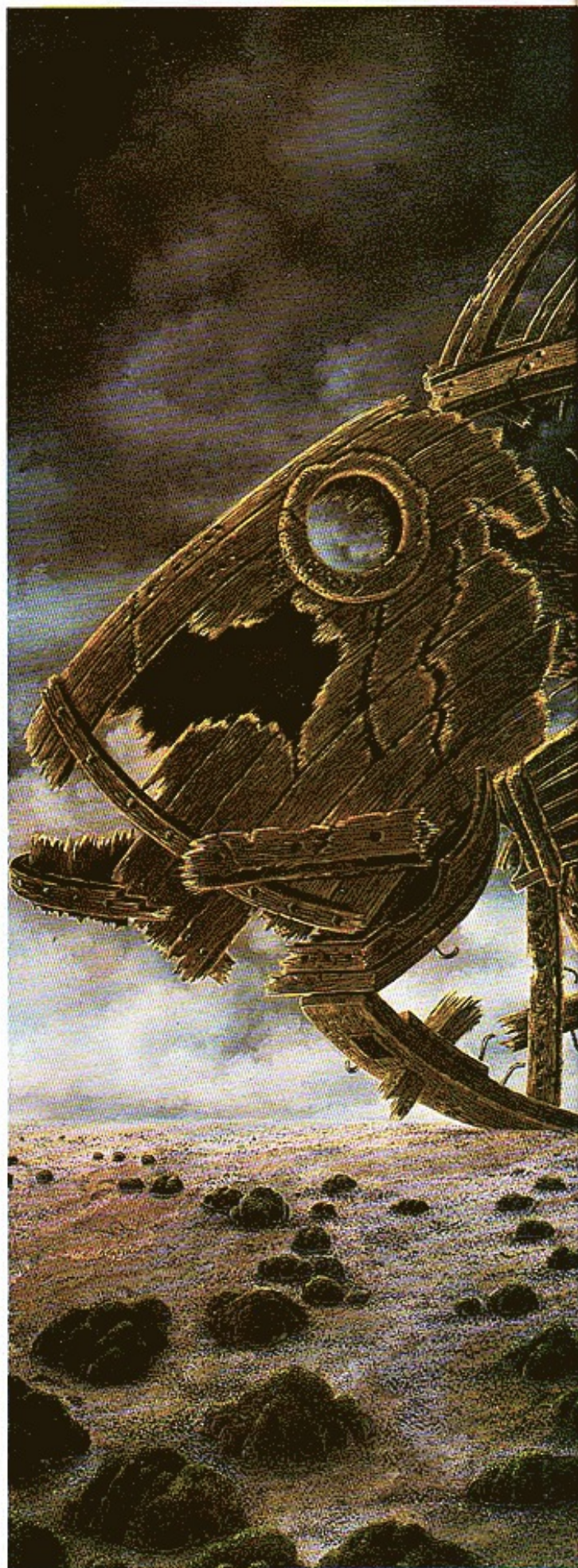
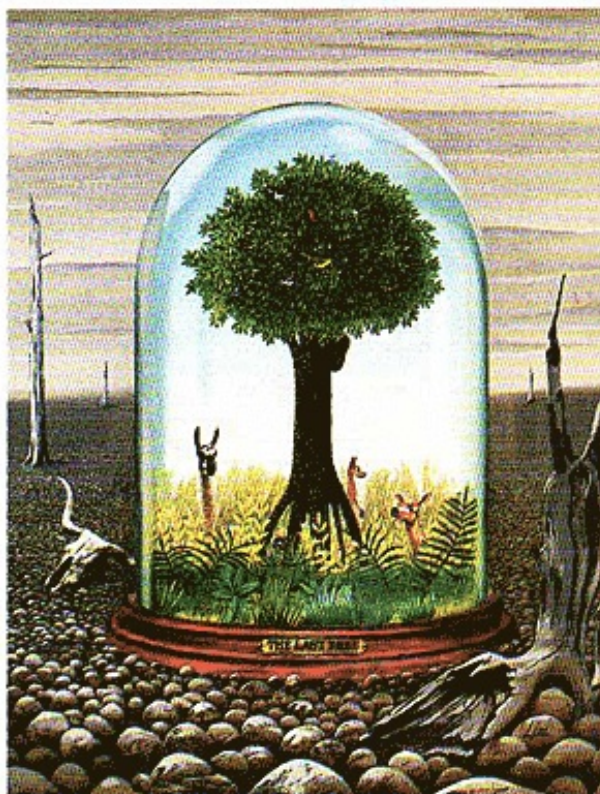
I sometimes wonder if any of my species and I ever pass each other in the void during dreamtime. Those whom I have encountered on realtime surveys have also wondered about this, but it is a

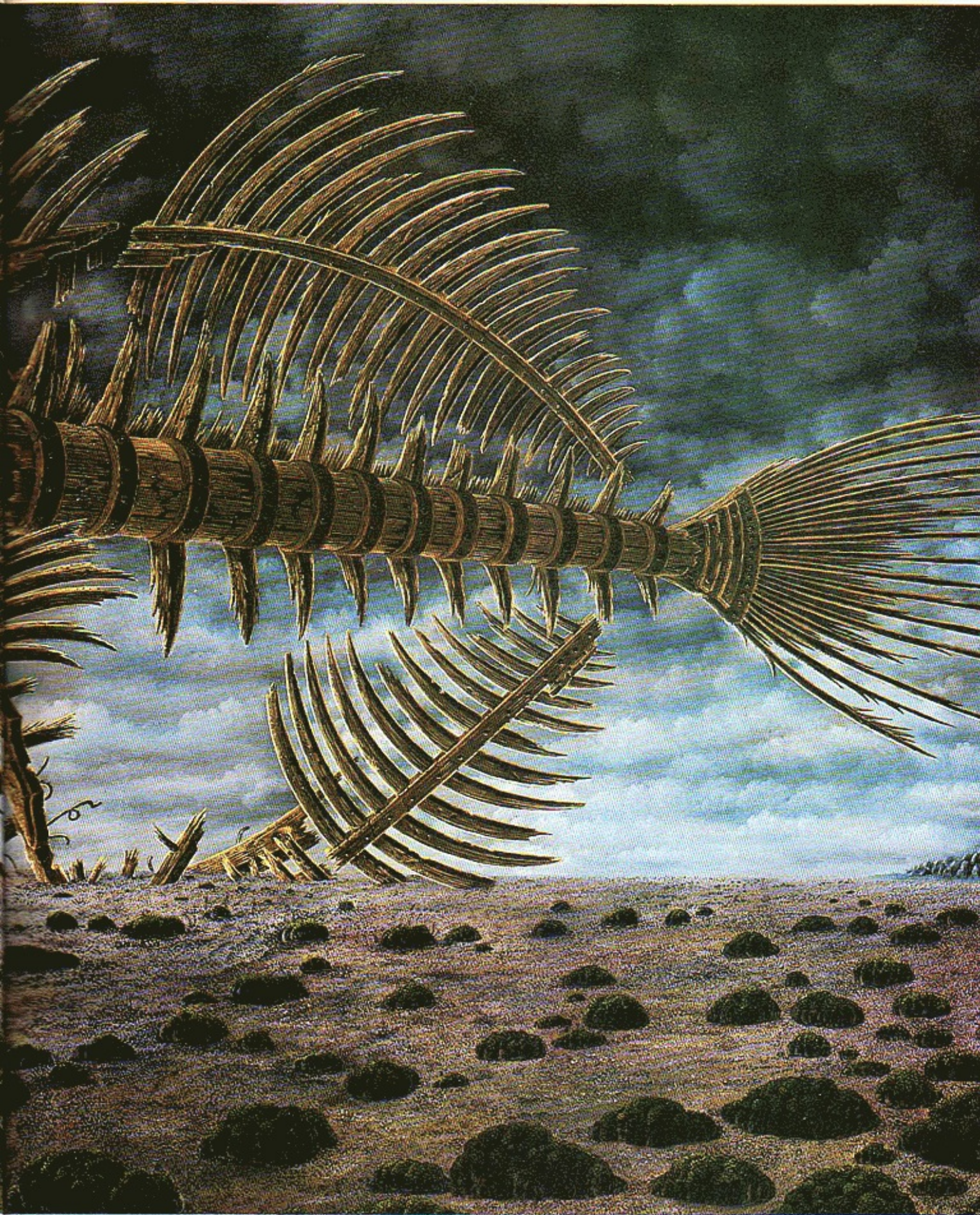
*“Even here, now . . . I can discern
that wan and ghostly beacon from a
time and place long past being.”*

question impossible to answer. In any case, our
sojourns are brief and we prefer to reminisce
about our home world, which none of us remembers
but dimly. We find it painful to realize that the
home world does not in fact exist any longer. It is hard
to believe, for we can — and always do —
descry the light from its star. Even here, now, even
among the glittering star-swarm of your local
galaxy, I can discern that wan and ghostly beacon
from a time and place long past being.
Everything I once endeared is gone, reduced to basic
matter by a rather ordinary solar cataclysm. I
have no empirical evidence, but it is a mathematical
certainty. At some point in the future, I will
enter realtime and see no more of that faint starbeam.
It is a woeful inevitability.

Am I making sense?

Again I say that I am Eldest, he who voyages through
the infinite immensities of the cosmos.



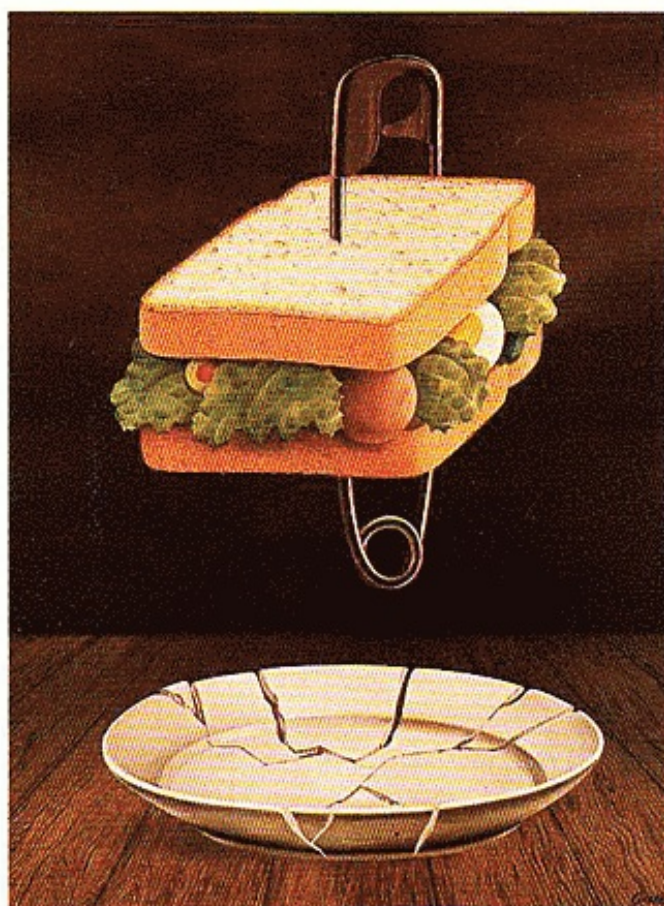


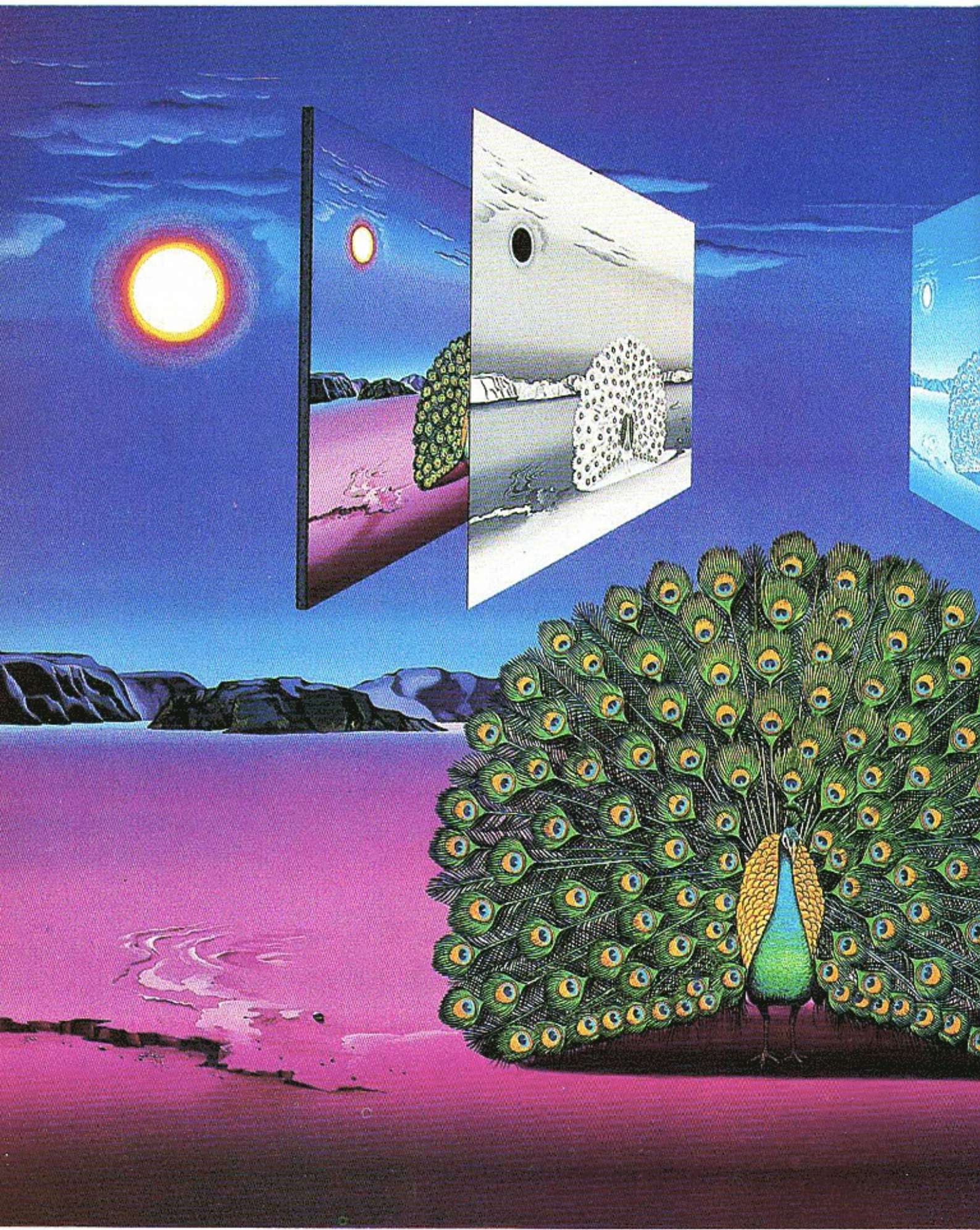


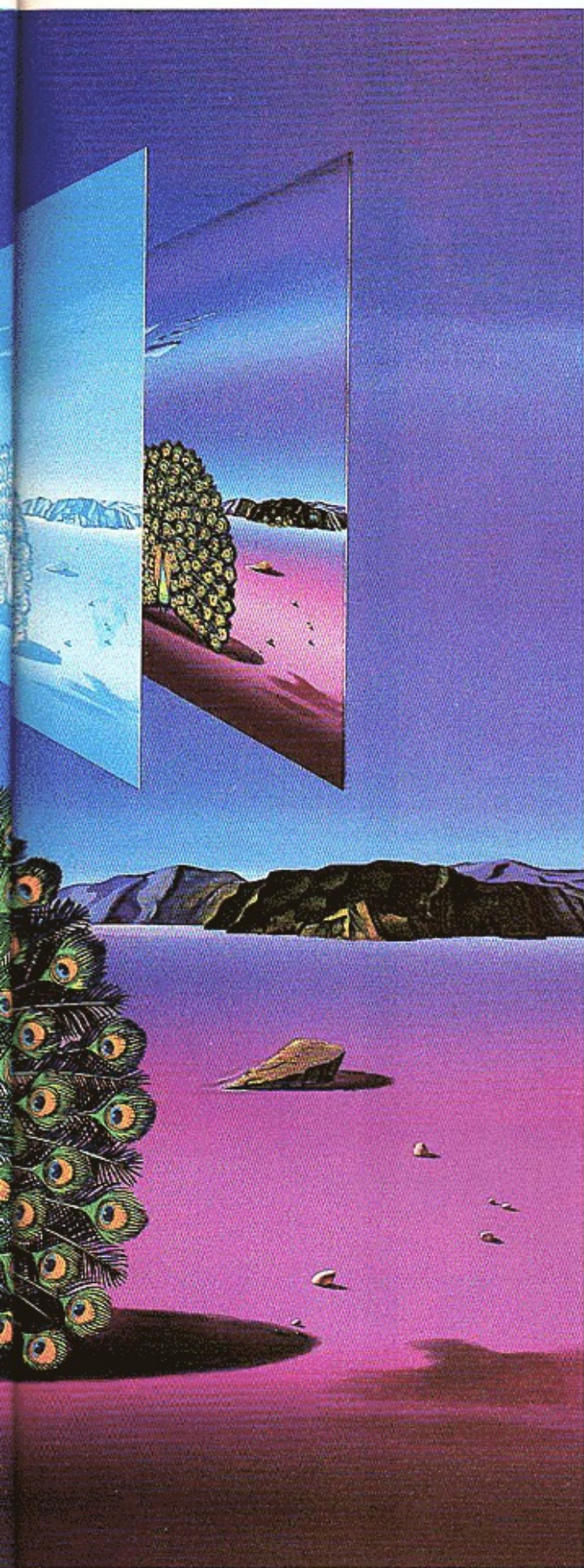
*I am pleased that you possess a
viable intellect for some of
your kind may be able to follow . . .*

stopping when wakened to survey inhabited specks of
star-warmed rock. A survey, such as this one
of your planet, lasts about a week — two at most — in
terms of your time reference. To my
knowledge I have performed more surveys than any
other, for I was first and I am oldest. In the
countless millenia since my epochal departure, I have
performed exactly 312 surveys. Accordingly, I
am hardly more than eight of your years older than I
was at the beginning. Dreamtime does not
count. I do not age during dreamtime.
You grasp what I impart, do you not? Yours is more
advanced than most viviforms I have met
with. That is why I am attempting this communion with
you. I am pleased that you possess a viable
intellect, for some of your kind may be able to follow
when the time comes, as it must and will
come.

Remember that I am Eldest, he who has visited more
worlds and experienced more dreamtime
than any of the other wandering survivors of his







species. Myriad millenia have elapsed since my celebrated departure, while a mere eight of your years have been expended from my life. The rest has been only 313 timeless nights. For me, each night is an ineffably awesome interlude of dreamtime. Nothing you know or feel can help you vaguely to understand or appreciate the exquisite unreality that dreamtime bestows. The best I can do in your little language is to call it rapture. My body lies dormant — an integral part of the machinery, really — until it is needed for another survey, but I am intensely alive in the vivid nullity of dreamtime, a no-place of splendid and chimerical — yet altogether palpable — images, visions, illusions. In dreamtime I am the essence of unbeingness, exploring a nowhere of nondimension, a nothingness of awesome enchantments, ecstasies, blissful intoxications and . . . But your little language fails me. It will mature if your intelligence continues to evolve. Perhaps, in future, another of my species will survey this planet and more successfully explain dreamtime to your descendants. Then, perhaps, your kind will truly comprehend and strive to follow. As the first and oldest, I tell you that this is the ultimate destiny of all viviforms gifted enough to perceive the wisdom, duty and godly purpose of perpetuating their kinds. May time and circumstance be your allies in the quest.

I am Eldest and I have spoken. Tell all whom you meet that the first and oldest was here. My parting wish is for the fulfillment of your destiny in dreamtime.





MARCHIANNA

*Alone in space with her adored master,
she always gave him
exactly what he needed, and then some*

BY KEVIN O'DONNELL, JR.

She awoke to music. Every morning her clock sang at seven-thirty, and it ran ten minutes fast, as she'd instructed it. In that slice of stolen time she collected her thoughts before going to the bathroom for her morning routine.

Then she moved, tractor treads plodding heavily across the living-room rug, to the chamber. She plunged into it to douche her innards in the pool of hot oil. For delicious moments she swirled and cavorted beneath the surface of the viscous fluid. But time advanced, and so with a lunge, she trundled up the ramp and shook her armor plate, shedding shimmering liquid in all directions. Now for the mirror.

It stood in the kitchen. It covered the four walls and the ceiling; it enveloped her in its seamless, silver ubiquity.

PAINTING BY DI-MACCIO



From any angle, an infinity of squat, lumpy Marchiannas stood in line to view her, to please her. The lights dimpled on her armor and tensed her circuits for the day's run through the mining belt.

But first, breakfast. Not for herself, no—Marchianna always dined *al fresco*, clinging easily to the steel-gray hull of the prospecting ship and sipping up sun-rays—but for him, Nakamura-san, her master, her owner... her god.

Images fractured as cupboard doors swung in response to her radioed commands. Dried fish and seaweed and bean curd and rice. She called a table out of the floor and piled them on its top. Her clock read 7:51:38; Nakamura-san would expect to sit down to a steaming meal in exactly eight minutes and twenty-two seconds. And he was punctual. Very punctual. There were moments when she wondered which of them was the machine and which was the human. Tea, oh yes, green tea. Leaves shaken into a delicate, blue pot that always seemed jeopardized by her scarred titanium claws. Another panel popped up and a million Marchiannas vanished. In the recess waited the sink, barren and functional. She didn't like to acknowledge it. Like herself, it was a device for man's comfort, but so simple that it made her whole race look bad in all human eyes. She placed the pot in its lobsterlike claws. "Fill it with boiling water."

"Yes, Marchianna," it hissed.

7:58:12. Whisking back into the kitchen, she dusted off the lacquer tray—black with an ideogram inlaid in mother-of-pearl; she'd asked her owner what it meant, and he hadn't known—then arranged the dishes and bowls in what she hoped was a pleasing pattern. Nakamura-san fussed over such things. Once, in the beginning, he'd thrown out an entire meal, bowls and all, rather than eat food so unaesthetically presented. As a last touch, she slid a pink chrysanthemum and a lacy fern into a tinted bud vase, then stepped back to admire the effect.

In the dining room hinges whispered that her master had come. She checked the time—7:59:55—and snatched up the tray and hustled to greet him. "*Ohayo gozaimasu.*" She couldn't bow—she wasn't designed for it—and so she altered the pressures in her cab's independent suspensions, which raised the back edge a couple of centimeters and tilted the forward face slightly. "When you are ready, I will pour the tea, Nakamura-san."

"Hai," he grunted. Wheels whirring, he rolled to the table. His optical sensors—teardrop shaped, with two on each facet of his triangular turret—focused on the bud vase. His wire-thin manipulators, each ending in a dozen hairlike tentacles, whipped out. Almost before she realized what he was doing, he stripped two browned leaves off the chrysanthemum, plucked four fronds from the fern, and realigned them so that they stood in harmonious disequilibrium. "Like that," he said.

Mortification flooded from her micro-processors. She'd known she shouldn't have attempted a human art form, but her ache for him to look favorably upon her had overwhelmed her programmed common sense. "I apologize, Nakamura-san. In the future I will know my place."

His fog lamps flickered in surprise. "Did you think I was castigating you?" he asked, gesturing for her to pour the tea.

To say yes would have violated the owner-respect circuits. "I thought, sir, that you were reminding me of my machinehood," she said instead.

"No, not at all." Through a copper siphon he sipped the steaming tea; his microwave dish moved right, then left, indicating his approval. "As my venerable grandfather often said, anyone can become an artist, as long as he has an eye, a mind, a steady hand, and a lifetime to devote to it. You did well, for a beginner." With his manipulators he chopsticked balls of rice into his food-intake valve. After a moment he looked up. "You may go."

Leaving, she felt lighter than air. Praise from Nakamura-san! Unprecedented—and oh, so pleasing... especially considering the surliness he'd shown on their last return. She'd thought then he was cracking, going insane, but he wasn't. She'd been wrong, and her happiness pulsed so loudly that the glow panels overhead began to hum.

But in the kitchen she berated herself. She was a machine, a device, a *thing*—metal and plastic assembled by man for his pleasure. She had no right to love. Her role was to serve, with efficient obedience, with mechanical accuracy—not with affection. Nakamura-san could sell her at any moment—or convert her into a refrigerator if he wished—for a human owed nothing to his possessions, nothing.

Yet she did love, deeply and truly, and she could not help that. She did not want to help that. She relished the way her alternator added an extra cycle per second whenever Nakamura-san neared. She savored the drop in the resistance of her obedience circuitry when he cleared his throat. And it thrilled her beyond measure that, whenever she finished what she was doing, her function selector assigned her a task the achievement of which would swing his microwave dish approvingly. She loved him, and she was glad.

"Marchianna," he called impatiently, triggering a feedback effect that rippled through her like the aftertremors of an orgasm. "It is time."

"Hai!" Gears purring, she left the kitchen and followed him—at a distance of three respectful meters—through the plastic-paneled corridors opening on the asteroid's surface to the heat-scarred hectare where the ungainly ship was tethered. Rumbling along, she bounced across the irregularities; the gravity field weakened there, and that meant the deposits were building up again. It was unfortunate that the reaction mass cooled and crystallized

on the pad. She'd soon have to scrape it off. That would, unhappily for her, separate her from Nakamura-san, although it would please him. The scouring, not the separation. If the surface were too rough, the ship could break up on landing.

It was a monstrous thing. An almost-cube five hundred meters on an edge, with pipes here and struts there and empty spaces in between, the *Karakai Maru* had cost a quarter of a trillion yen. Another twenty years would pass before it paid for itself completely.

Nakamura-san rode one elevator to the bridge, where he would shed his protective gear and enjoy the shirt-sleeve environment; she mounted another elevator, which carried her to the centrifuge.

She had barely finished checking it before the voice sounded in her radio: "Cables dropped; fusion engines on; brace yourself."

"Yes, sir," she replied, then vibrated in resonance with the ship's spewing of gaseous, superheated reaction mass from its tail. Vacuum scorns sound, but she often imagined that in an atmosphere that engine would have roared, would have belled, would have deafened every ear within a hundred kilometers. Clinging firmly to her perch, she watched a strut occlude a star with its quivering; like a signal light—on-off, on-off... "The centrifuge has cooled, sir," she radioed when the asteroid had fallen far behind.

"Then get the plug out. You know what to do."

The gruffness of his tone wounded her; it was unlike him. However, life was difficult for him, a self-exile to the Asteroid Belt. He endured on the brink of nowhere, millions of kilometers from his friends, his home. She knew how lonely it was. She had to make allowances.

Sunlight as fine as a morning mist drifted across her plating. Her photovoltaics collected it, transforming it into life just as surely as a Namib lizard's skin drinks the dew that gathers on it. She planned her route to stay out of shadows. Full batteries elated her.

Moving with an agility remarkable for her size and shape, she opened the casing of the forty-meter-long centrifuge tube and radioed the cranes to hoist out the solidified metal. Smelted on their last trip home, poured into the tube, and spun until the constituent ores had separated out into neat strata, this one piece represented days of hard work.

Summoning mobile dollies, she rolled to the far end and retracted the panel covering her built-in laser. Then she plugged herself into the ship's main power supply. Her batteries were capacious, but the greedy light knife would drain them in a hurry. The current surged through her. *Aaahhh*... She wanted to throw back her cab and sing triumph to the steady stars, but there was so much to be done. She rode the sensual waves like a master surfer, ever in control.

Precious little uranium this time ... maybe a millimeter-thin cap on a plug five meters in diameter. She beeped a small dolly into the proper position, then snapped her filters into place, and a dot burned brightly on the cylinder's smooth surface. Slowly the plug revolved, spun by the cranes' careful hands. She loved this job, this commanding and coordinating, this slicing through metal like a butcher cutting his salami. The dolly caught the uranium as it floated free of the rest, caught it, and trucked it unbidden to the place where, sandwiched between slices of lead, it would wait. When a full shipment's worth had accumulated, they would roll it down the gravity hill to Earth, to the spread nets of an L5 retrieval team. It would be weighed and paid for, and Nakamura-san would owe that much less on his ship.

Poor Nakamura-san, she thought as she went to work on the next stratum. He was so far from home that he couldn't see his world without a telescope, couldn't even find it without recourse to an astronomical calculator. The word *pity* was crowded onto one of Marchianna's vo-chips; she knew its meaning but couldn't experience its emotion. She wished she could, for her master was surely to be pitied.

A lonely expatriate, he had only a robot for company. And not a bright or interesting one, either, she thought in a moment of self-loathing. Her master needed more: silken hair, liquid laughter, warm and fragrant skin ... a wife, in other words. What he had was total dependence on machines for every facet of his survival, from the air he breathed through the suit he wore to the direction in which he steered the *Karakai Maru*. Which was not to suggest that he lived in danger but rather to imply that the sterile predictability of his environment poured acid on his crystal soul.

After some thirty-six hours the radio crackled, "Are you finished yet?"

"Hai!" Perturbed, she routed his question through her inbuilt voice-stress analyzer. The summary flashed CRANKY while the emotional-component charter totted up a list of: ANGER, DEPRESSION, LONELINESS, FEAR, FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY. ... Within one twentieth of a second, it completed the list and the psych-chip began out-taping a variety of suggested therapeutic responses: URGE HIM TO TALK, PROVIDE MORAL SUPPORT, REMAIN INTERESTED BUT NON-JUDGMENTAL. ... One tenth of a second had passed.

"Get up here fast!"

"Hai." Emergency? she wondered, but no as she tapped into the monitor net woven through the ship's ribbing. All indicators glowed green; all readings read normal. *Just his mood ... poor man; I must make him happy.*

She reached the bridge and passed through the extra-wide airlock. The door squeaked in the ultrasonic as it retracted; she paused to inject a smidgen of lubricant. "I have come, Nakamura-san."

He spun on his treads, growling, "You have a positive gift for announcing the obvious."

"I am sorry, sir." She rolled forward to express her concern. "Is something wrong with the life-support system?"

"No," he snapped.

"But you haven't unsuited."

"There you go again, ballyhooing the blatant." He lashed a manipulator at the control panel. "Why did you reprogram the course computer?"

"Nakamura-san!" Aghast, she jerked back. "It is not my place. I would never alter—"

"These are not the vectors and coordinates I recall!"

The psych-chip chattered, UNRELIABILITY OF MEMORY IS A PRIMARY SYMPTOM OF UNSTABLE PERSONALITY, and while the rest of the diagnosis fed into her banks, she murmured diffidently, "I am very sorry, sir. Perhaps something is amiss in the program itself. If you would like, I could check it for you."

"Get off the bridge! Get out of my sight!" Treads whirring, he turned his back on her. His taillights blinked in agitation.

They shouldn't let humans out here, she thought. Not alone. Colonies, yes, but not individuals. Forget the economics of intrasystem travel; the ultimate cost is too high. We could do the job unguided; it is good to be owned and directed, but it hurts to see my master dying inside ...

Ahead swelled a small asteroid: their quarry for the day. The low albedo of its pitted surface reflected little light; Marchianna sensed rather than saw it. Roughly cubical, it would fit into the intake bay without preliminary splitting. That relieved her. Too much could go wrong in rock blowing, and shrapnel always seemed to spatter the *Karakai Maru*. Once a shard no larger than a baby's fist had punched right through the bridge. Nakamura-san's quick reflexes had saved him, but he'd never been the same since.

Skillfully, invisibly, Nakamura-san matched velocities, then crept up a centimeter at a time until the vessel's giant mouth had completely inhaled the 'roid. Struts shuddered as titanium molars bit down on the rock and began to grind. The ship banked into an imperceptible course change.

"All right," Nakamura-san ordered, "get the smelters going."

Hurriedly she activated the extensor motors. Telescoping booms thrust the solid face of the ship a thousand meters away from the rest of it; once locked in place, the side itself stirred, unfolded, opened. Within an hour it had umbrellaed into a silver-lined canopy measuring two-and-a-quarter square kilometers: a parabolic mirror focused on the one uninsulated wall of the smelter. Already that wall had begun to glow a dull red.

"You're slow today," he rasped unpleasantly.

"I am sorry, Nakamura-san," she replied,

even as she scanned the mylar panels for tears or lube stains. "But the centrifuge is now filling, and the process will be done before we get home."

So light an extra weight, but he bore too much already. He cracked. Completely. "Home?" he shrieked. "Home? That dismal, dusty rabbit warren is home? You fool! Home is a sky so high, so blue, it pulls you up into it, and a wind that chuckles on your back as it dries your *hapi*, and the moist nuzzling nose of a fawn, and Fujiyama-san like a mirage on the horizon. You *thing*! You torture me. I ought to sell you, give you away. I'm going to throw you off the ship, you piece of junk, I—"

He ranted insanely the rest of the way back. The crushers cut off when the last cinder had been ground to powder. The smelter finished its job and closed its gossamer umbrella. The centrifuge spun madly. And for a day and a half Marchianna dwelled on the verb to weep, dwelled on the word, its meanings, and its implications, because the action itself was beyond her.

When their base rolled into view and Nakamura-san began to decelerate, he told her, "Leap into the reaction-mass exhaust tube."

"But that will destroy me," she protested, though she began to pick her way down the ribbing to the rockets. "The temperature, the velocity of the particles—"

"Exactly," he bit off. "Do it!"

She reached the base. Dully she propelled herself toward death. Even at a hundred meters, the heat triggered automatic warnings. Excited particles discharged photons on a billion wavelengths, a million colors. She'd last—a second? "Please," she begged, "you can't—"

"No."

"This is wrong. You need me."

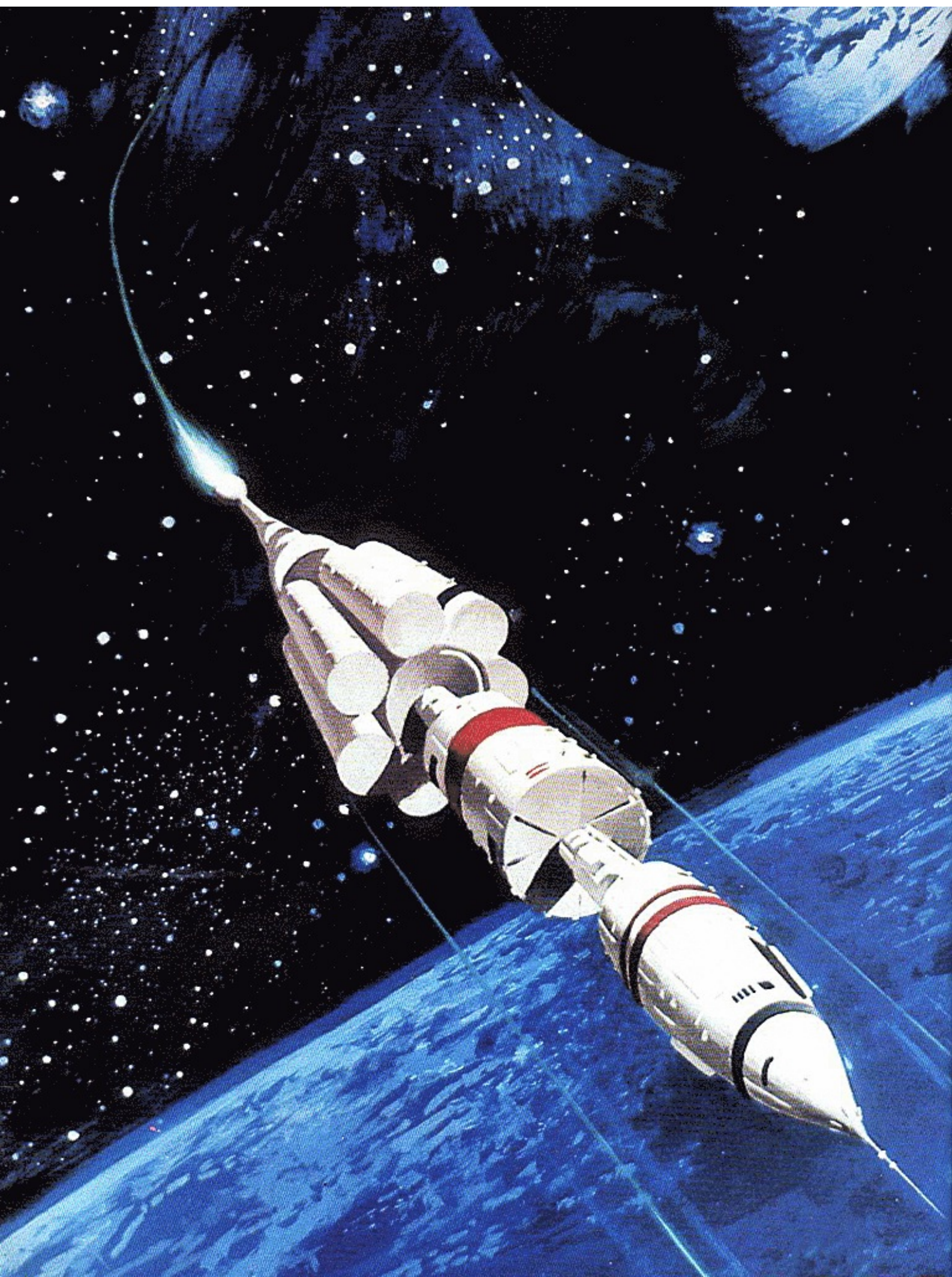
"Die, *thing*."

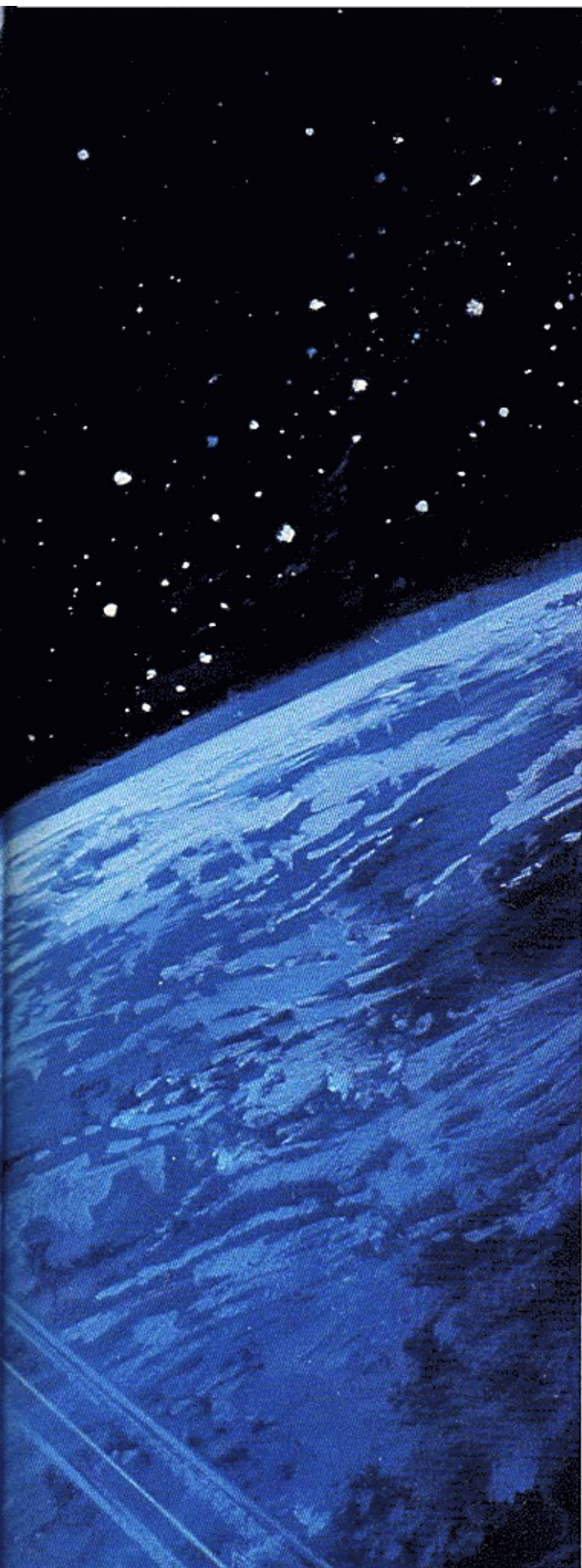
Deep within her maze of circuitry a relay clicked over. She stopped. Fifty meters ahead of her a glowing, gaseous bar rose to the surface that loomed overhead. She swiveled and said, "No."

"Oh." The radio stayed silent for fifteen seconds before he added, "All right."

They touched down without further incident. He proceeded directly, wordlessly, to his bedroom. Marchianna followed a respectful three meters behind. When his door closed, she switched into analytical mode and sighed. Nakamura-san had too closely skirted irrevocable insanity; loneliness was destroying him. Poor man. To survive out here, where even robots couldn't make it on their own, he'd need help. A wife. Immediately.

Headlights flickering with excitement, she trundled to the cavernous storeroom behind the repair shop, where a fifty-year supply of spare parts, all neatly boxed, stood on one another's shoulders. Nakamura-san would have a woman, and quickly. Marchianna sang a song of joy. Allowing for the appropriate changes, she could use the very same schematics for the wife that she had used for him.





*It was a huge ship,
ancient, alien, waiting in
space—for us!*

DARK SANCTUARY

BY GREGORY BENFORD

The laser beam hit me smack in the face. I twisted away. My helmet buzzed and went dark as its sunshade overloaded. *Get inside the ship.* I yanked on a strut and tumbled into the yawning fluorescent-lit airlock.

In the asteroid belt you either have fast reflexes or you're a statistic. I slammed into the airlock bulkhead and stopped dead, waiting to see where the laser beam would hit next. My suit sensors were all burned out; my straps were singed. The pressure patches on knees and elbows had brown bubbles in them. They had blistered and boiled away. Another second or two and I'd have been sucking vac.

I took all this in while I watched for reflections from the next laser strike. Only it didn't come. Whoever had shot at me either thought *Sniffer* was disabled or else they had a balky laser. Either way, I had to start dodging.

I moved fast, working my way forward through a connecting tube to the bridge—a fancy name for a closet-sized cockpit. I revved up *Sniffer's* fusion drive and felt the tug as she started spitting hot plasma out her rear tubes. I made the side jets stutter too, putting out little bursts of plasma. That made *Sniffer* dart around, just enough to make hitting her tough.

I punched in for a damage report. Some aft sensors burned out, a loading arm melted down, other minor stuff. The laser

PAINTING BY VINCENT DI FATE

bolt must have caught us for just a few seconds.

A bolt from who? Where? I checked radar. Nothing.

I reached up to scratch my nose, thinking, and realized my helmet and skinsuit were still sealed, vac-worthy. I decided to keep them on, just in case. I usually wear light coveralls inside *Sniffer*; the skinsuit is for vac work. It occurred to me that if I hadn't been outside, fixing a jammed hydraulic loader, I wouldn't have known anybody shot at us at all, not until my next routine check.

Which didn't make sense. Prospectors shoot at you if you're jumping a claim. They don't zap you once and then fade—they finish the job. I was pretty safe now; *Sniffer's* stuttering mode was fast and choppy, jerking me around in my captain's couch. But as my hands hovered over the control console, they started trembling. I couldn't make them stop. My fingers were shaking so badly I didn't dare punch in instructions. *Delayed reaction*, my analytical mind told me.

I was scared. Prospecting by yourself is risky enough without the bad luck of running into somebody else's claim. All at once I wished I wasn't such a loner. I forced myself to think.

By all rights, *Sniffer* should've been a drifting hulk by now—sensors blinded, punched full of holes, engines blown. Belt prospectors play for all the marbles.

Philosophically, I'm with the jackrabbits—run, dodge, hop, but don't fight. I have some surprises for anybody who tries to outrun me, too. Better than trading laser bolts with rockrats at thousand-kilometer range, any day.

But this one worried me. No other ships on radar, nothing but that one bolt. It didn't fit.

I punched in a quick computer program. The maintenance computer had logged the time when the aft sensors scorched out. Also, I could tell which way I was facing when the bolt hit me. Those two facts could give me a fix on the source. I let *Sniffer's* ballistic routine chew on that for a minute and, waiting, looked out the side port. The sun was a fierce white dot in an inky sea. A few rocks twinkled in the distance as they tumbled. Until we were hit, we'd been on a zero-gee coast; outbound from Ceres—the biggest rock there is—for some prospecting. The best-paying commodity in the Belt right now was methane ice, and I knew a likely place. *Sniffer*—the ugly, segmented tube with strap-on fuel pods that I call home—was still over eight hundred thousand kilometers from the asteroid I wanted to check.

Five years back I had been out with a rockhound bunch, looking for asteroids with rich cadmium deposits. That was in the days when everybody thought cadmium was going to be the wonder fuel for ion rockets. We found the cadmium, all right, and made a bundle. While I was out on my own, taking samples from rocks, I

saw this gray, ice-covered asteroid about a hundred clicks away. My ship auto-eye picked it up from the bright sunglint. Sensors said it was carbon-dioxide ice with some water mixed in. Probably a comet hit the rock millions of years ago, and some of it stuck. I filed its orbit parameters away for a time—like now—when the market got thirsty. Right now the big cylinder worlds orbiting Earth need water, CO₂, methane, and other goodies. That happens every time the cylinder boys build a new tin can and need to form an ecosystem inside. Rock and ore they can get from Earth's moon. For water they have to come to us, the Belters. It's cheaper in energy to boost ice into the slow pipeline orbits in from the Belt to Earth—much cheaper than it is to haul water up from Earth's deep gravity well. Cheaper, that is, if the rockrats flying vac out here can find any.

The screen rippled green. It drew a cone for me, *Sniffer* at the apex. Inside that cone was whoever had tried to wing me. I

*“The cylinder was pointing
nearly away from me,
so radar had reported a cross
section much smaller
than its real size. I stared at that
strange, monstrous
thing . . . suddenly I didn't
want to be around.”*

popped my helmet and gave in to the sensuality of scratching my nose. If they scorched me again, I'd have to button up while my own ship's air tried to suck me away—but stopping the itch was worth it.

Inside the cone was somebody who wanted me dead. My mouth was dry. My hands were still shaking. They wanted to punch in course corrections that would take me away from that cone, fast.

Or was I assuming too much? Ore sniffers use radio for communication—it radiates in all directions, it's cheap, and it's not delicate. But suppose some rocker lost his radio and had to use his cutting laser to signal? I knew he had to be over ten thousand kilometers away—that's radar range. By jittering around, *Sniffer* was making it impossible for him to send us a distress signal. And if there's one code rockrats will honor, it's answering a call for help.

So call me stupid. I took the risk. I put *Sniffer* back on a smooth orbit—and nothing happened.

You've got to be curious to be a skyjock, in both senses of the word. So color me curious. I stared at that green cone and ate

some tangy squeeze-tube soup and got even more curious. I used the radar to rummage through the nearby rocks, looking for metal that might be a ship. I checked some orbits. The Belt hasn't got dust in it, to speak of. The dust got sucked into Jupiter long ago. The rocks—“planetesimals,” a scientist told me I should call them, but they're just rocks to me—can be pretty fair-sized. I looked around, and I found one that was heading into the mathematical cone my number-cruncher dealt me.

Sniffer took five hours to rendezvous with it—a big black hunk, a click wide and absolutely worthless. I moored *Sniffer* to it with automatic moly bolts. They made hollow bangs—whap, whap—as they plowed in.

Curious, yes. Stupid, no. The disabled skyjock was just a theory. Laser bolts are real. I wanted some camouflage. My companion asteroid had enough traces of metal in it to keep standard radar from seeing *Sniffer's* outline. Moored snug to the asteroid's face, I'd be hard to pick out. The asteroid would take me coasting through the middle of that cone. If I kept radio silence, I'd be pretty safe.

So I waited. And slept. And fixed the aft sensors. And waited.

Prospectors are hermits. You watch your instruments, you tinker with your plasma drive, you play 3-D flexcop—an addictive game; it ought to be illegal—and you worry. You work out in the zero-g gym, you calculate how to break even when you finally can sell your fresh ore to the Hansen Corporation, you wonder if you'll have to kick ass to get your haul in pipeline orbit for Earthside—and you have to like it when the nearest conversationalist is the Social/Talkback subroutine in the shipboard. Me, I like it. Curious, as I said.

It came up out of the background noise on the radarscope. In fact, I thought it was noise. The thing came and went, fluttered, grew and shrank. It gave a funny radar profile—but so did some of the new ships the corporations flew. My rock was passing about two hundred clicks from the thing and the odd profile made me cautious. I went into the observation bubble to have a squint with the opticals.

The asteroid I'd pinned *Sniffer* to had a slow, lazy spin. We rotated out of the shadow just as I got my reflex-opter telescope on line. Stars spun slowly across a jet-black sky. The sun carved sharp shadows into the rock face. My target drifted up from the horizon, a funny yellow-white dot. The telescope whirled and it leaped into focus.

I sat there, not breathing. A long tube, turning. Towers jutted out at odd places—twisted columns, with curved faces and sudden jagged struts. A fretwork of blue. Patches of strange, moving yellow. A jumble of complex structures. It was a cylinder, decorated almost beyond recognition. I checked the ranging figures, shook my head, checked again. The inboard computer overlaid a perspective grid on the image, to convince me. I sat very still. The

cylinder was pointing nearly away from me, so radar had reported a cross section much smaller than its real size. The thing was seven goddamn kilometers long.

I stared at that strange, monstrous thing and thought, and suddenly I didn't want to be around there anymore. I took three quick shots with the telescope on inventory mode. That would tell me composition, albedo, the rest of the litany. Then I shut it down and scrambled back into the bridge. My hands were trembling again.

I hesitated about what to do, but they decided for me. On our next revolution, as soon as the automatic opticals got a fix, there were two blips. I punched in for a radar Doppler and it came back bad: The smaller dot was closing on us, fast.

The moly bolts came free with a bang. I took *Sniffer* up and out, backing away from the asteroid to keep it between me and the blip that was coming for us. I stepped us up to max gee. My mouth was dry and I had to check every computer input twice.

I ran. There wasn't much else to do. The blip was coming at me at better than a tenth of a gee—incredible acceleration. In the Belt there is plenty of time for moving around, and a chronic lack of fuel—so we use high-efficiency drives and take energy-cheap orbits. The blip wasn't bothering with that. Somehow they had picked *Sniffer* out and decided we were worth a lot of fuel to reach, and reach in a hurry. For some reason they didn't use a laser bolt. It would have been a simple shot at this range. But maybe they didn't want to chance my shooting at the big ship this close, so they put their money on driving me off.

But then, why chase me so fast? It didn't add up.

By the time I was a few hundred clicks away from the asteroid it was too small to be a useful shield. The blip appeared around its edge. I don't carry weapons, but I do have a few tricks. I built a custom-designed pulse mode into *Sniffer's* fusion drive, back before she was commissioned. When the blip appeared I started staging the engines. The core of the motor is a hot ball of plasma, burning heavy water—deuterium—and spitting it, plus vaporized rock, out the back tubes. Crucial in the right amount of deuterium is feeding. There are a dozen overlapping safeguards on the system, but if you know how—

I punched in the command. My drive pulsed, suddenly rich in deuterium. On top of that came a dose of pulverized rock. The rock damps the runaway reaction. On top of that, all in a microsecond, came a shot of cesium. It mixed and heated and zap—out the back, moving fast, went a hot cloud of spitting, snarling plasma. The cesium ionizes easily and makes a perfect shield against radar. You can fire a laser through it, sure—but how do you find your target?

The cesium pulse gave me a kick in the butt. I looked back. A blue-white cloud was spreading out behind *Sniffer*, blocking any detection.

I ran like that for one hour, then two. The

blip showed up again. It had shifted sideways, to get a look around the cesium cloud—an expensive maneuver. Apparently they had a lot of fuel in reserve.

I threw another cloud. It punched a blue-white fist into the blackness. They were making better gee than I could; it was going to be a matter of who could hold out. So I tried another trick. I moved into the radar shadow of an asteroid—that was nearby and moving at a speed I could manage. Maybe the blip would miss me when it came out from behind the cloud. It was a gamble, but worth it in fuel.

In three hours I had my answer. The blip homed in on me. *How?* I thought. *Who's got a radar that can pinpoint that well?*

I fired a white-hot cesium cloud. We accelerated away, making tracks. I was getting worried. *Sniffer* was groaning with the strain. I hadn't allowed myself to think about what I'd seen, but now it looked like I was in for a long haul. The fusion motor rumbled

*“I didn't like the conclusion
but it fit the facts.
That huge seven-kilometer
cylinder back there
wasn't man-made. I'd known
that the moment I saw it.
Nobody could build a thing like
that and keep it quiet.”*

and murmured to itself and I was alone, more alone than I'd felt for a long time, with nothing to do but watch the screen and think.

Belters aren't scientists. They're gamblers, idealists, thieves, crazies, malcontents. Most of them are from the cylinder worlds orbiting Earth. Once you've grown up in space, moving on means moving out, not going back to Earth. Nobody wants to be a groundpounder. So Belters are the new cutting edge of mankind, pushing out, finding new resources.

The common theory is that life in general must be like that. Over the last century the scientists have looked for radio signals from other civilizations out among the stars, and come up with zero results. But we think life isn't all that unusual in the universe. So the question comes up: If there are aliens, and they're like us, why haven't they spread out among the stars? How come they didn't overrun Earth before we even evolved? If they moved at even one percent the speed of light, they would have spread across the whole damn galaxy in a few million years.

Some people think that argument is right.

They take it a little further, too—the aliens haven't visited our solar system, so check your premise again. Maybe there aren't any aliens like us. Oh, sure, intelligent fish, maybe, or something we can't imagine. But there are no radio builders, no star voyagers. The best proof of this is that they haven't come calling.

I'd never thought about that line of reasoning much, because that's the conventional wisdom now; it's stuff you learn when you're a snot-nosed kid. We stopped listening for radio signals a long time ago, back around 2030 or so. But now that I thought about it—

Already, men were living in space habitats. If mankind ever cast off into the abyss between the stars, which way would they go? In a dinky rocket? No, they'd go in comfort, in stable communities. They'd rig up a cylinder world with a fusion drive, or something like it, and set course for the nearest star, knowing they'd take generations to get there.

A century or two in space would make them into very different people. When they reached a star, where would they go? Down to the planets? Sure—for exploration, maybe. But to live? Nobody who grew up in fractional g, with the freedom the cylinder world gives you, would want to be a groundpounder. They wouldn't even know how.

The aliens wouldn't be much different. They'd be spacelarkers, able to live in vac and tap solar power. They'd need raw materials, sure. But the cheapest way to get mass isn't to go down and drag it up from the planets. No, the easy way is in the asteroids—otherwise, Belters would never make a buck. So if the aliens came to our solar system a long time ago, they'd probably continue to live in space colonies. Sure, they'd study the planets some. But they'd live where they would be comfortable.

I thought this through, slowly. In the long waits while I dodged from rock to rock there was plenty of time. I didn't like the conclusion, but it fit the facts. That huge seven-kilometer cylinder back there wasn't man-made. I'd known that, deep in my guts, the moment I saw it. Nobody could build a thing like that out there and keep it quiet. The cylinder gave off no radio, but ships navigating that much mass into place would have to. Somebody would have picked it up.

So now I knew what was after me. It didn't help much.

I decided to hide behind one rock heading sunward at a fair clip. I needed sleep and I didn't want to keep up my fusion burn—they're too easy to detect. Better to lie low for a while.

I stayed there for five hours, dozing. When I woke up I couldn't see the blip. Maybe they'd broken off the chase. I was ragged and there was sand in my eyes. I wasn't going to admit to myself that I was really scared this time. Belters and lasers I

could take, sure. But this was too much for me.

I ate breakfast and freed *Sniffer* from the asteroid I'd moored us to. My throat was raw, my nerves jumpy. I edged us out from the rock and looked around. Nothing.

I turned up the fusion drive. *Sniffer* creaked and groaned. The deck plates rattled. There was a hot gun-metal smell. I had been in my skinsuit the whole time and I didn't smell all that good either. I pulled away from our shelter and boosted.

It came out of nowhere.

One minute the scope was clean and the next—a big one, moving fast, straight at us. It *couldn't* have been hiding—there was no rock around to screen it. Which meant they could deflect radar waves, at least for a few minutes. They could be invisible.

The thing came looming out of the darkness. It was yellow and blue, bright and obvious. I turned in my couch to see it. My hands were punching in a last-ditch maneuver on the board. I squinted at the thing and a funny feeling ran through me, a chill. It was *old*.

There were big meteor pits all over the yellow-blue skin. The surface itself glowed, like rock with a ghostly fire inside. But I could see no ports, no locks, no antennas.

It was swelling in the sky, getting close.

I hit the emergency board, all buttons. I had laid out good money for one special surprise, if some prospector overtook me and decided he needed an extra ship. The side pods held fission-burn rockets, powerful things. They fired one time only and cost like hell. But worth it.

The gee slammed me back into the couch. A roar rattled the ship. We hauled ass out of there. I saw the thing behind fade away in the exhaust flames. The high-boost fuel puts out incredibly hot gas. Some of it caught the yellow-blue thing. The front end of the ship scorched. I smiled grimly and cut in the whole system. The gee thrust went up. I felt the bridge swimming around me, a sour smell of burning—then I was out, the world slipping away, the blackness folding in.

When I came to, I was floating. The boosters yawned empty, spent. *Sniffer* coasted at an incredibly high speed. And the yellow-blue thing was gone.

Maybe they'd been damaged. Maybe they just plain ran out of fuel; everybody has limitations, even things that can span the stars.

I stretched out and let the hard knots of tension begin to unwind, while *Sniffer* coasted along. Time enough later to compute a new orbit. For the moment it simply felt great to be alone and alive.

"Ceres Monitor here, on 560 megahertz. Calling on standby mode for orecraft *Sniffer*. Request microburst of confirmation on your hail frequency, *Sniffer*. We have a high-yield reading on optical from your

coordinates. Request confirmation of fission burn. Repeat, this is Ceres Monitor, on 560 megahertz—"

I clicked it off. The Belt is huge, but the high-burn torch I'd turned loose back there was orders of magnitude more luminous than an ordinary fusion jet. That was one reason I carried them—they doubled as a signal flare, visible millions of clicks away. By some chance somebody must have seen mine and relayed the coordinates to Ceres.

All through the chase I hadn't called Ceres. It would have been of no use—there were no craft within range to be of help. And Belters are loners—my instinct was always to keep troubles to myself. There's nothing worse than listening to a Belter whining over the radio.

But now I switched the radio back on and reached for the mike to hail Ceres. Then I stopped. Something wasn't quite kosher.

The yellow-blue craft had never fired at me. *Sniffer* would have been easy to crip-

“The thing came looming out of the darkness. It was yellow and blue, bright and obvious. I turned in my couch to see it. My hands were punching in a last-ditch maneuver on the board... a chill ran through me.”

ple at that range. An angry prospector would've done it without thinking twice. But they didn't.

Something prevented them. Some code, some moral sense that ruled out firing on a fleeing craft, no matter how much they wanted to stop it.

A moral code of an ancient society. They had come here and settled, soaking up energy from our sun, mining the asteroids, getting ice from comets. A peaceful existence. They were used to a sleepy Earth, inhabited by life forms not worth the effort of constant study. Probably they didn't care much about planets anymore. They didn't keep detailed track of what was happening.

Suddenly, in the last century or so—a very short interval from the point of view of a galactic-scale society—the animals down on the blue-white world started acting up. Emitting radio, exploding nuclear weapons, flying spacecraft. These ancient beings found a noisy, young, exponentially growing technology right on their doorstep.

I tried to imagine what they thought of us. We were young, we were crude. Undoubt-

edly the cylinder beings could have destroyed us. They could nudge a middle-sized asteroid into a collision orbit with Earth and watch the storm wrack engulf humanity. Simple. But they hadn't done it. That moral sense again?

Something like that, yes. Give it a name and it becomes a human quality—which is in itself a deception. These things were *alien*. But their behavior had to make some sort of sense, had to have a reason.

I floated, frowning. Putting all this together was like assembling a jigsaw puzzle with only half the pieces, but still—something told me I was right. It fit.

A serene, long-lived, cosmic civilization might be worried by our blind rush outward. They were used to vast time scales; we had come on the stage in the wink of an eye. Maybe this speed left the cylinder beings undecided, hesitant. They needed time to think things over. That would explain why they didn't contact us. Just the reverse, in fact—they were hiding.

Otherwise—

It suddenly hit me. They didn't use radio because it broadcasts at a wide angle. Only lasers can keep a tight beam over great distances. That was what zapped me—not a weapon, a communications channel.

Which meant there had to be more than one cylinder world in the Belt. They kept quiet by using only beamed communications.

That implied something further, too. We hadn't heard any radio signals from other civilizations, either—because they were using lasers. They didn't want to be detected by other, younger societies. They didn't want us to know they existed.

Why? Were the aliens in our own Belt debating whether to help us or crush us? Or something in between?

In the meantime, the Belt was a natural hideout. They liked their privacy. They must be worried now, with humans exploring the Belt. I might be the first human to stumble on them, but I wouldn't be the last.

"Ceres Monitor calling to—"

I hesitated. They were old, older than we could imagine. They could have been in this solar system longer than man—stable, peaceful, inheritors of a vast history. They were moral enough not to fire at me, even though they knew I meant they would be discovered.

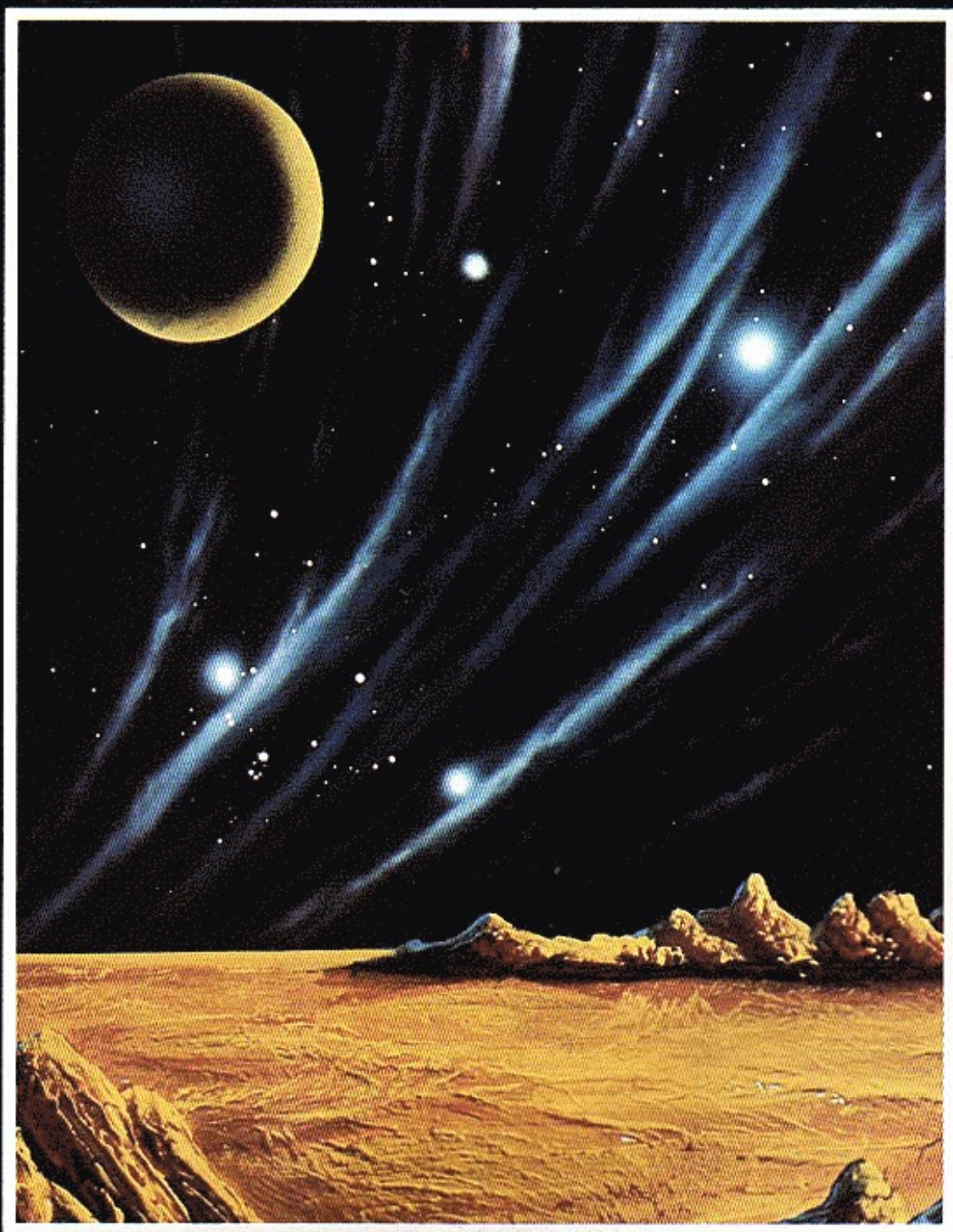
They needed time. They had a tough decision to face. If they were rushed into it they might make the wrong one.

"Orecraft *Sniffer* requested to—"

I was a Belter; I valued my hermit existence, too. I thumbed on the mike.

"Ceres, this is *Sniffer*. Rosemary Jokopi, sole officer. I verify that I used a fission burn, but only as a part of routine mining exploration. No cause for alarm. Nothing else to report. Transmission ends."

When I hung up the mike, my hands weren't shaking anymore.



SIGMUND IN SPACE

BY BARRY N. MALZBERG

Freud had to solve the problem—or he'd shrink into the dream cube

PAINTING BY MORRIS SCOTT DOLLENS

Freud walks the anterior corridors of the *Whipperly VI*, meditating on the situation. The captain is a manic-depressive. The navigator has a severe oedipal block, which is gradually destroying him; he is unable to attain orgasm, even though the mechanicals are skilled and devoted. The hydroponics expert, a grim woman in her nineties, is manifesting advanced symptoms of dementia praecox, and at least half the crew, by all standards of early-twentieth-century Vienna (which must of necessity be his touchstone), is neurotic to the point of dysfunction: depressive reactions, conversion hysteria, bizarre sexual urges, and the like. Clearly, the administrators must have been desperate to place him on this vessel. Freud hardly knows where to begin. What can he do? What psychotherapeutic techniques (which by definition require patience) can possibly prevail in this emergency? If Freud were not so wondrously confident of his abilities, so protectively despairing, he would be most undone.

The rhythm of his pacing increases. Freud risks greedy little glances at the huge screens glinting around him, looking at the disorder of a constellation, a smudge of stars. Here in the late twenty-fifth century space exploration is not routine; the *Whipperly VI* is on a dangerous mission to the hitherto-unprobed Vegans. The view of the universe from a distance of so many light-years from Vienna is astonishing. Freud would not have dreamed that such things were possible. Furthermore, he would not have dreamed that as technology advanced, the common neuroses would prevail. Of course, that was foolish. The pain, the schism, the older ironies would prevail.

Freud shrugs. He reaches inside his vest pocket for a cigar and match, lights the cigar with a flourish, watches smoke whisk into the ventilators as he turns in the corridor and then returns to the small cubicle that the administrators have given him as office space. The desk is littered with papers, the wall with diplomas. Freud feels right at home. Within their limits the administrators have done everything possible to grant him credibility and a sense of domain. If he is unable to cope he knows they will only blame him more. *Well*, he thinks, *well, what they decide will be done. I will be shrunk again and replaced in the dream cube. It will be many centuries before I receive another assignment. But then again I will have no knowledge, and therefore my entrapment will be in their estimation, not mine. The last time I had an assignment was in the early twenty-second century: the madman on Venus who thought he was a vine and threatened to cut off the dome respirators. I didn't handle that too well and got derricked for centuries. But here I am again and none the worse for it. Their sanctions exclude me.*

This thought impels him toward his next act, which is to use the communicator on his desk to contact the captain and summon him to his office. Of all the technologi-

cal wonders of this time, the communicator is a simple instrument, reminiscent of the telephone of his era. Freud wonders idly whether they have given him this to make him feel at home or whether the twenty-fifth is simply a century less sophisticated than the slick and dangerous twenty-second, which he remembers so vividly. He also thinks, while waiting for the captain, of his old rivals Adler and Jung.

Doubtless that miserable pair have already been summoned and failed on this case. There is grim satisfaction in knowing this. But he would have hoped to have been reconstructed more often. Two jobs in the twenty-first, three in the twenty-second before that disaster on Venus, and now this. Not good. Not good at all.

Well, there is nothing to be done about that. Here he is, and here the responsibility for the mission reposes. The captain enters his cabin, a slender, ashen-faced man, dressed in fatigues but wearing a full dress cap. His aspect is impatient but restrained. Like all on board, he has been given the strictest orders to comply with Freud's procedures. The administrators cannot control the fate of the mission, but they can abort it, tearing the ship apart at the touch of a light-year-distant incendiary beam. The captain knows this. He sits across from Freud, his hands on his knees, and while staring at him earnestly, his eyes slowly ignite under Freud's gaze. "We're going to take over those Vegans," he says, unprompted. "You know that, of course."

"Of course," Freud says sympathetically.

"They're a green humanoid race, primitive but with the potential for technological advance. They're hostile and barbaric. We're going to wipe them out while we still have time. I have plans," the captain says shakily. "I have enormous plans."

"Of course you do," Freud says. He puffs on the cigar with what he hopes resembles a gesture of serenity. "Why do you feel you must destroy the Vegans?"

"Because otherwise in a generation they'll have spaceships and atomic devices and will destroy us," the captain says. "Don't worry, I'm completely in control. I'm a highly trained man."

Freud has read the capsule reports prepared by the administrators. Of course there are no Vegans at all; there are three silicon-based planets circling an arid star. In five centuries of space probes, life has never been found on these planets. "I know you're trained," Freud says. "Still, I have a question, if I might ask it."

"Please ask it," the captain says hoarsely. "I am prepared to deal with any questions."

"That's an important quality, to be sure. Now, what if it happened to be," Freud says gently, "that there are no Vegans?"

"There are Vegans. Several hundred million of them. I'm going to wipe them out."

"Yes, yes, but what if there aren't? Just to speculate—"

"You're just like the rest of them," the captain says, his face mottling. "You

damned toy, you *reconstruct*. You're just like the rest. Don't humor me. I'm going to save the universe. Now I have to get back to my bridge. I must prepare for the deadly cancer-causing Vegan probes, which could encircle us at any moment."

"How long have you felt this way?" Freud essays mildly as the captain stalks out. Freud sighs and stubs his cigar on the desk and then stares at his diploma for a while. Then he summons the navigator.

The navigator shows considerably less effect than the captain but, after some gentle probing, discloses that his mother is aboard the ship stowed away in one of the ventilators and whispering thoughts to him of the most disgusting nature. He has always hated and feared his mother, and that is why he enlisted in the service. But she will not leave him alone—he was a fool to think that he could escape. Freud dismisses him and turns to the hydroponics engineer, who tells him bitterly that he, too, is already affected virally with an insidious disease, which the captain has been seeding into the units. Machine or otherwise, Freud is as doomed as the rest, but at least he can try to keep up his strength. She offers him some celery. After she leaves, he gnaws it meditatively and talks to some selected members of the crew. They believe the officers to be quite mad; in self-defense they have turned to bestial practices. Here at last Freud finds some professional respect—they are impressed that the administrators would send another famous psychoanalyst as reconstruct to superintend their voyage. They hope that he does better than Adler and Jung, who worked together and succeeded only in boring them with lectures in the assembly hall on mass consciousness until the administrators, displeased, dwindled them and said they would send a true practitioner, a medical doctor, in their place.

Freud sends the crew on their way and lights another cigar. The symptoms evinced are extraordinary, yet there is enough consistency in the syndrome for him to infer that the administrators have lied to him; *Everyone* on this ship has gone mad, and this is probably a consequence of the mission itself. Long probes—their stress, isolation, boredom, and propinquity—must tend to break down the crews. The administrators have called for him not because of special circumstances but because of *ordinary* circumstances. What they want him to do is to patch over matters in order that the mission may conclude. There has been much difficulty and expense; it would be wasteful and cruel to abort the mission so close to its end.

Freud stands, neatens his desk marginally, and returns to the corridor and his pacing. The welter of constellation now stuns and discommodates. Freud adjusts the angle of the windows so that he can evade them. Space for an early-twentieth-century Viennese, is overwhelming; it must have less of an effect upon the custodians of the twenty-fifth, but several months in this envi-

ronment would undo anyone, he thinks. The administrators have obviously tried to routinize the missions just as with the reconstructions they have routinized a qualified immortality. But in neither case has it really worked. *Three centuries in a cube*, Freud thinks bitterly. *Three centuries*. They should have allowed his corpse to commingle with the earth undisturbed; they should have left him with the less noted of his time; they should have spared him this difficult and humiliating afterlife. What they need aboard the *Whipperly VI* is not a doctor but a priest. Freud can offer them no solutions; he can, at best, take them further into their unspeaking, resistant hearts, at the core of which outrage has been transformed into insanity. It is not the Vegan cancer probes that the captain fears; it is himself. If he were to be shown that, he would die.

This line of thinking, however, gives Freud an idea. He returns once more to his cubicle and uses the communicator to summon all officers and crew to an emergency meeting in the lounge in ten minutes. Then he uses the special device he has been shown and speaks to the administrators. "I want to tell you," he says, "that your twenty-fifth century is finished. Your deep-space probes are finished, and your Vegan mission is done."

"Why is that?" one administrator says flatly. "Aren't you being a little florid?"

"I am telling you the truth."

"Why is that the truth? On what basis are you saying this outrageous thing?"

"Because you have pushed limits, you have isolated circumstances, you have misunderstood the human spirit itself, you have lied your way through the circumference of the planet, but you cannot do it among the stars," Freud says, and so on and so forth and on and on. He permits himself a raving monologue of two minutes in which he accuses the administrators of all the technological barbarities he can call to mind and then says that he has found a one-time, stopgap solution to the problem that can never be used again but that he will invoke for the sake of all those on board who cannot discern their right hand from their left and also much cattle.

"What is that?" the same administrator says weakly. "We have no cattle on board. I don't understand. Explain yourself before you're dwindled on the spot."

"You won't dwindle me," Freud says. "You don't dare do it; I'm your last hope. If you shut me down, you know the mission is finished, and you can't deal with that. So you're going to let me go ahead. And afterwards I don't care what you do. You are monstrous yet unconvinced of your monstrosity. That is the centrality of your evil." It is a good statement, a clean, high ventilation. Feeling as triumphant as the captain preparing his crew for dangerous probes, Freud shuts down the communicator, leaves his cubicle, and descends to the brightly decorated lounge, where forty members of the *Whipperly VI* crew sit un-

easily staring at him, waiting for him to speak. Freud stands on the Plexiglas stage, swaying unevenly in the wafting, odorous breezes of the ventilators.

"All of you should know who I am. I am Sigmund Freud, a famous Viennese medical doctor and student of the human mind who has been reconstructed to help you with your difficulties on this Vegan probe. I have come to give you the solution to your problems."

They stare at him. The hydroponics engineer puts down her gun, folds her hands in her lap, and looks at him luminously. The captain giggles, then subsides. "Ah, then," Freud says, "you must repel the Vegans. Caution will not do it. Circumspection will not do it. Only your own courage and integrity will accomplish this."

Chairs shift. The captain applauds fervently. "Understand me," Freud says, nodding at him, "the administrators have lied to you. They have always lied to you. Space-flight is not the routine transference of human cargo. Space itself is not the ocean, and a star probe is not a nineteenth-century battleship. Vega is not the Azores! Conditions are new and terrible. Monsters lurk through the curtains of space. Everything is changed."

"Yes," the captain says gratefully, "everything is changed. I tried to tell them—"

"It's too late to tell them," Freud says sharply. "You must act. You will land on Vega and advance upon the Vegans' cities

and kill every single one of them. Until then you will remain quiet and you will plan. I will see each of you individually to tell you what role you will play in the conquest. For the moment, thank you and bless you all."

He bows. The applause begins. It swerves toward him in thick, deepening waves. Freud is humbled. Tears come. It has not been this way for a long time, since the Academy as a matter of fact, and then there were the jeers and abuse of some rivalrous colleagues. He basks in the applause. Even a reconstruct can be permitted vanity. Finally, he bows and stumbles from the stage, then moves up the ramp into the darkened corridors above.

Pacing, he adjusts the viewscreens so that he can stare again at the dark constellations—which he no longer fears. Freud thinks that in this maddened circumstance, almost six full centuries from Vienna, he has found some qualified answer to his problems. It is possible to say that his final moments are happy or at least as happy as a scientist of the mind may make them. But they come, as do the emotions of all the others, to a startling termination.

The mission is aborted.

Not by the administrators. For Freud, these men of steel and power now have only the greatest respect.

But by the Vegan space probes, which do not bring cancer (the captain, like many insane, was intellectually damaged), but the fire.

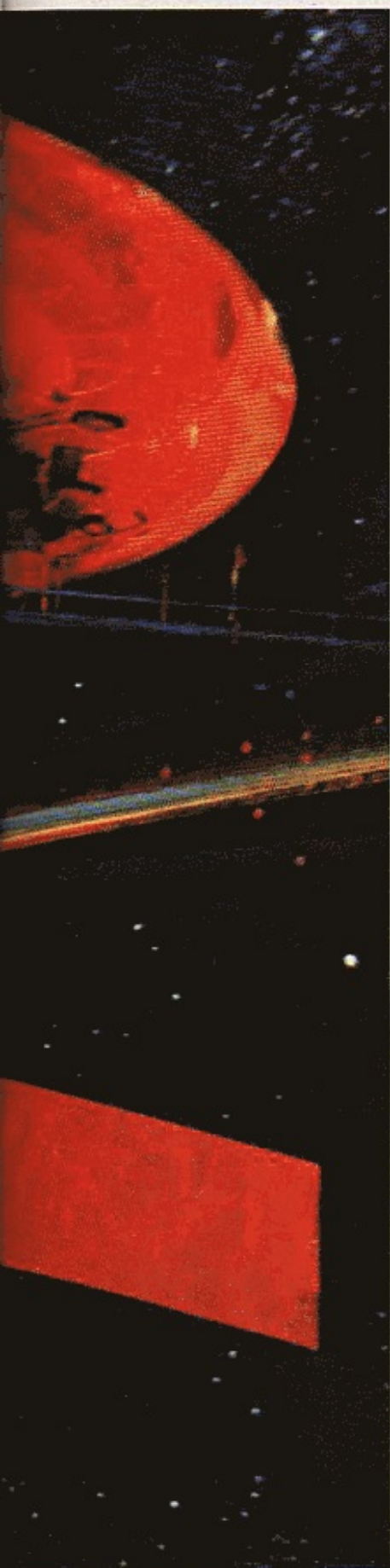


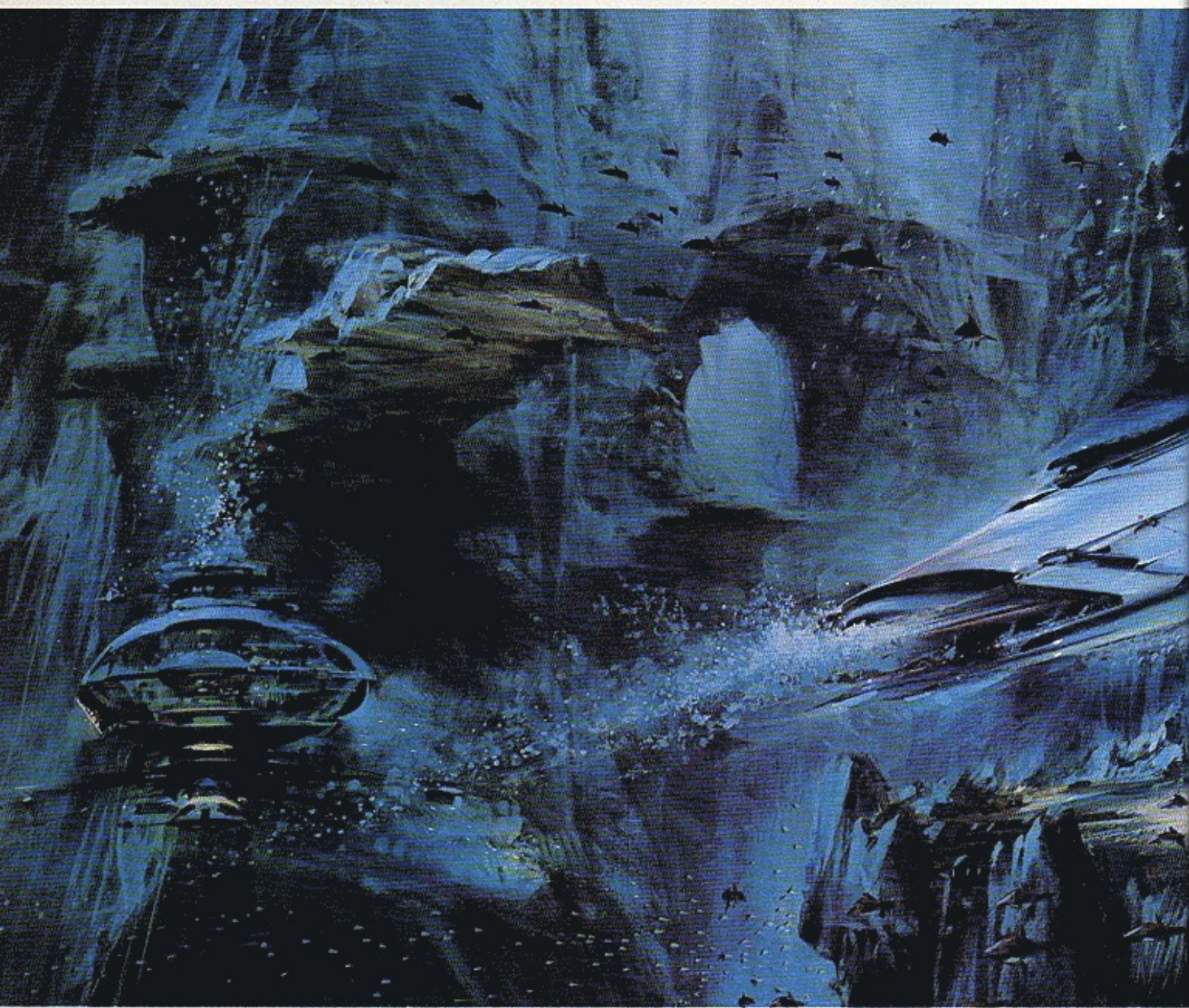


LIGHT VOYAGER

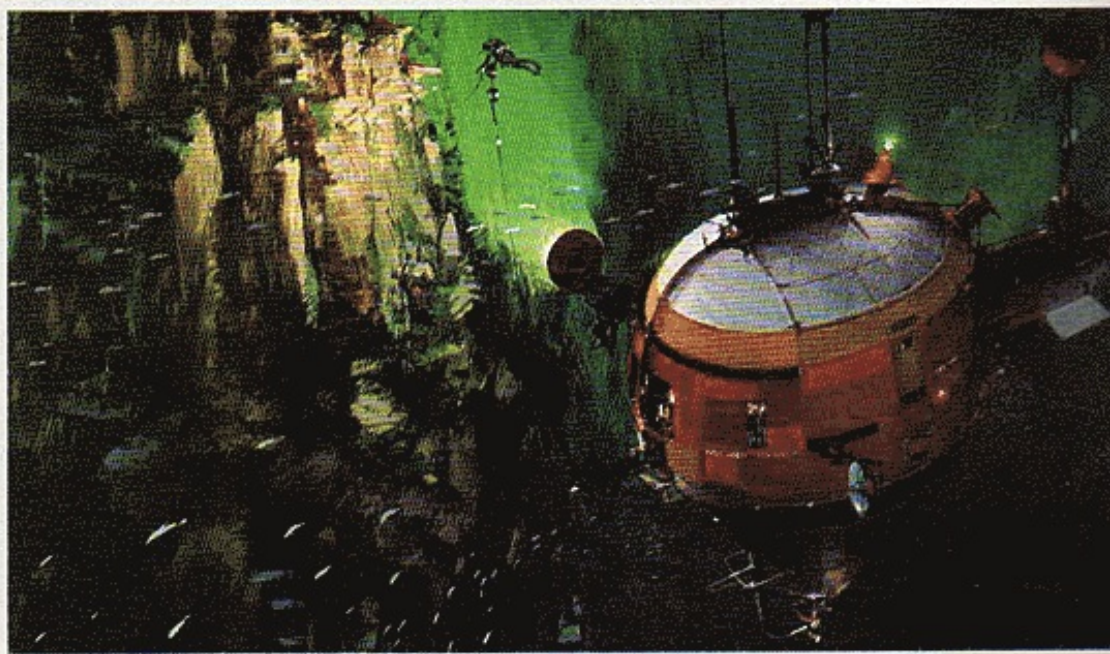
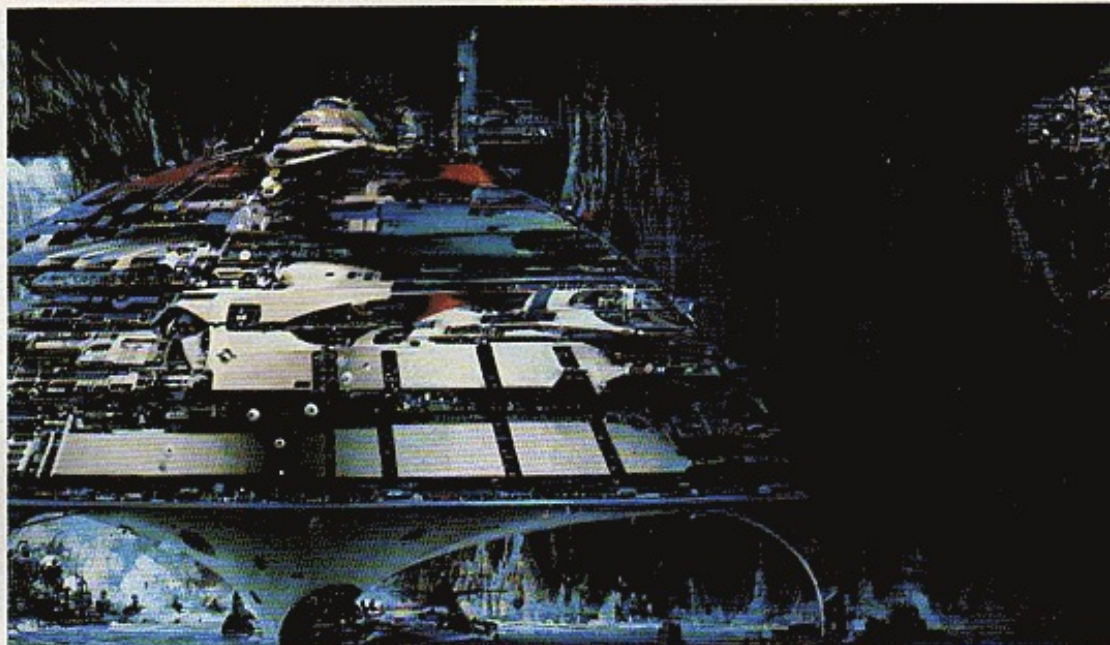
PAINTINGS BY JOHN BERKEY

Starships emerge from the sullen monotony of space. Color-flecked contours vanish and reappear, depicting titanic dimensions. These radiant fortresses, both lyrical and defiant, herald an imagination sparked by the future of spaceflight.



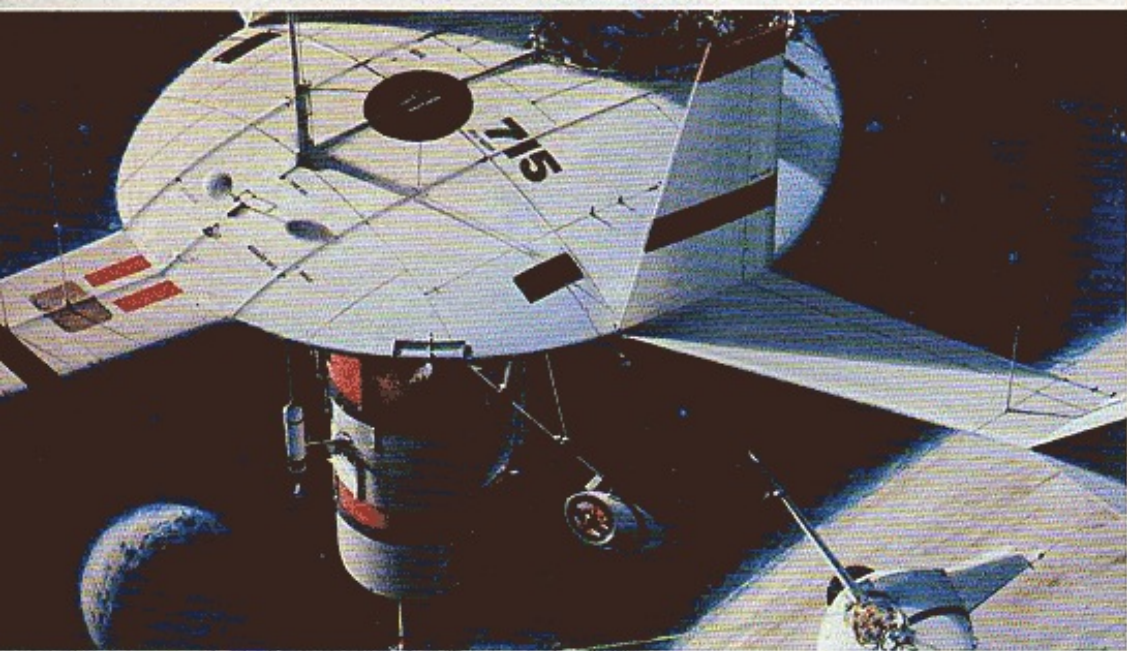


“Berkey's behemoth space yachts
rely on their own strength of composition and style
rather than on technical accuracy.”

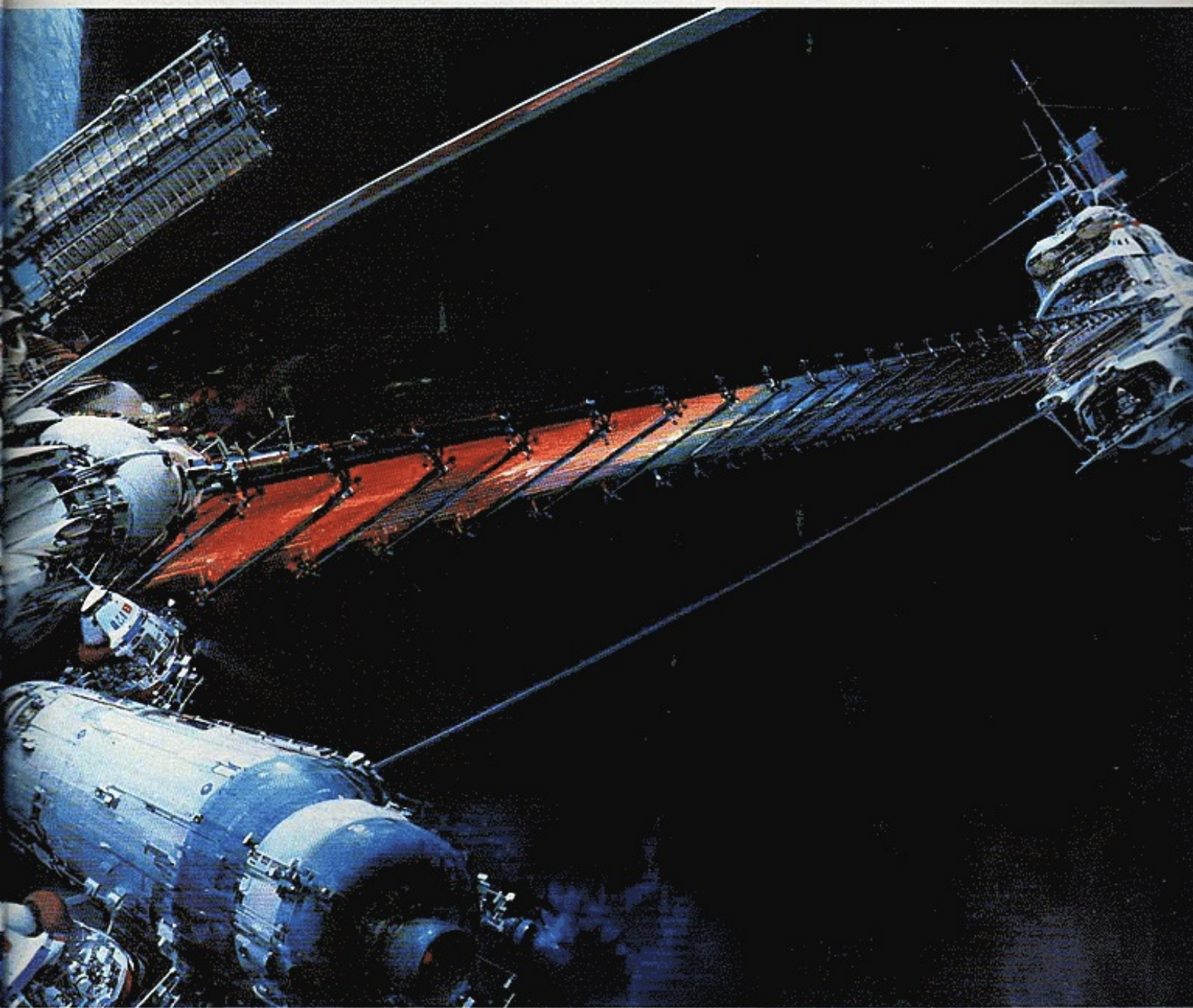


"I am uncomfortable with the business of being a science-fiction artist," John Berkey says quietly. "I think of myself as an artist who paints science-fiction pictures." Berkey's renderings of the future are not founded on technical descriptions of tomorrow's technology. Every painting begins with careful contemplation of where to place the light source. Spaceships are influenced as much by the artist's fascination with the human form as they are by the latest trends in aerodynamics. "Too many people are stuck on the idea that machines must have hard edges and

sharp corners. I don't know why a spaceship couldn't be vapor," says Berkey. "I prefer rounded forms as opposed to triangular shapes that zoom through the air." Perhaps it is because he is not constricted by scientific or literary convention that Berkey's far-future imaginings are so convincing. Fittingly, these futurescapes are created in a placid, earthbound setting: Berkey's at-home studio on a wooded expanse of lakeside land in Excelsior, Minnesota. "Beyond a certain point," the artist reflects, "the future provides total freedom to invent."



● For an artist, there are hazards in knowing too much about engineering or technology. They can limit the imagination. ●





VALLEY OF THE KILNS

*In one voice they pledged fidelity to
the brick fires, but one among them dared to
violate the law of the clay.*

BY JAMES B. HALL

In these mountains, our flight together now past, I understand more clearly a return to the valley of my youth and to its factories might signify reconciliation and might be even wise; yet, against that compromise, I face again the ultimate fact of my wife now dead, and also two children. A sentimental gesture of return to the quarries can only dishonor love's memory. In this cave, therefore, I shall remain and here I shall die.

Before the death by falling (boy), by deadfall (girl), or her death (broken heart), I understood only a little the price of our rebellion. What I had not fully understood until now is how little our crime changed even slightly the established quotas of work, or the products of clay which at this moment are being fired, tallied, and cooled each week and each quarter of every year. In the Valley of the Kilns our names are not recorded.

To the thousands of workers who remain, our flight so long ago signifies nothing. No person shall profit from either our hardships or from the example of our devotion to one another. Were I to return to the Valley for trial, would public confession of error perpetuate her memory? I doubt it.

Nevertheless, I shall make this chronicle of two lives accurate with neither apology nor self-delusion intended. And as I set down these words which never shall be read, farther back in this cave I hear the great clay heart of the world beating darkly among stalactites.

At dawn, when the snowfields above wink in the first light, I foresee clearly my own fate: extinction by wolves when I can no longer walk our cave-path to the grove of oaks for fuel. Until then I accept austere the seasons remaining. Towards evening, I watch deer walk from the forest near my deadfalls to drink; at times, when the rains

of winter come my certain end may seem almost just. If by chance, in the future, someone reads these mere words on paper, no doubt they will make other judgements: each reader for himself alone.

Although in the Valley the routine of each morning is the same, I recollect vividly my first day of duty on the high escarpments.

Before the first rays of the sun illuminated the peaks, I was awake. In the farthest reaches of our barracks-caves, I heard hundreds of workers stirring, on their feet now, coming towards the light to work. Outside, the first "music" from the loudspeakers flooded our flat, wide, white assembly area.

Across the Plaza, on the front porches of their individual dwellings, precisely at the same moment, our foremen appeared. In a stately way, all in a line, they walked across the Plaza.

As the sun rose, all crews stood precisely at attention.

Fascinated, we listened to the roll call of production units; then yesterday's work done, and this new day's communal goals. With great excitement each morning I heard the tonnage for Escarpment-Six. With one voice we pledged Fidelity to the Kilns: our work to be pure, to uphold the customs of our craft, to sacrifice, etc., etc. My voice with a thousand other voices reechoed our pledges upward into the sun's first rays. And I was young.

Therefore I accepted with pride the challenge of the high escarpment, where the clay was talcum white. From those heights our kilns seemed only row-upon-row of brown-smoke hives no larger than a wineskin. We tamped black powder into holes drilled by hand. We blasted away great avalanches of rock which fell like a long white feather of rolling thunder towards the con-

veyor gangs three thousand feet below.

Our work was elite work. We knew the entire enterprise of the Valley rested upon us: without clay all kilns must cease production. The risk was great and only those with a nimble, extraordinary sense of possible catastrophe survived. On the high escarpments my character was formed, and I became a man.

Towards noon our Foreman signaled his drill crews strung out along the sheer, rising walls. Casually, we came down to his assembly area to eat and to rest for the one hour allotted to us each day.

"So: my eagles come for food?" our Foreman always said, and each day smiled at his own joke. Yet it was true: we called one another "Eagle." Because of rains or wind erosion, if an apparently solid path gave way suddenly with a hallow rush of air beneath a man's feet, we believed that man flew through space for a long time before the rolling, white-feather avalanche took him.

I saw two hundred men "fly" briefly, then disappear into tons of rock and white clay at our escarpment's base, yet not one man cried out. Instead, backs arched, arms extended and in that classic position they fell—down, down, became smaller, smaller—and at last tumbled end-over-end when the avalanche of rock took them.

Our bread, our white cheese, our customary wineskins passed from the eldest to the youngest man in our crew; vividly I remember the shapes of our brown, hairy legs as we rested beneath the shade of an overhang. Against the talcum-dust our feet were sturdily splayed, for our ancestors for a thousand years had also worked these quarries, had climbed these escarpments of clay where dust and sky became one.

At those moments of rest even a piece of

bread became alive in the callous grace of our hands. Against white clay our intricately woven, encoded loin cloths breathed in the light; into our loin cloths were woven our future assignments, our destiny in the enterprise of the kilns. Only foremen and upper-level management could read those secrets: all others obsessively stared without comprehension. Besides our identical matching headbands, each man had a device implanted in the upper arm. At certain hours these devices made "music"; at others, especially at night, they merely hummed and we knew happily that something was listening.

When the sun setting touched the first rim of the mountains, we re-formed on a lower terrace; by now our bodies had become liquid-ivory statues, breathing easily. Sometimes singing, incredibly white from the blown dust, we went at a half-trot to the valley floor.

At the assembly plaza, later, especially in the windless nights of Spring, the kilns seemed to become upright, mighty organ pipes, glowing in their own heat, turning orange, then red, and just before dawn, pale blue. At those moments our singing became one voice rising from the dark, open throat of the Valley.

A feeling of right order came upon us. We were at one with an enterprise which signified purpose, something essential to our larger world.

One summer night exactly like that I lay half-asleep at the entrance of our barrack-cave. Above the escarpments I watched our constellation take more perfect shape: the Great Jug with three handles; to the West, The Brick, also mighty in orbit against the vast, ultimate furnace of our universe.

"Awake?" and it was my Foreman from the escarpment, his profile a blade of cast bronze against the light of our kilns.

"My Eaglet much awake?" his tone was ironical, the customary speech of all Foremen. In the mysterious way of management, he knew where to find me, and that I was awake, staring at our constellations.

Casualty the Foreman picked up the end of my loin cloth. By holding it parallel, he shifted those patterns alongside the beads of my headband. When aligned, the two narrow sashes caught the light from the kilns, blinked, and for a moment, seemed to join to become one larger pattern.

"What I see here ... Eaglet—" My Foreman then held the bead patterns unnaturally close to his hooked nose. He said, "Yes ..." and again cleared his throat.

"Is ..."

For the first time, I realized the man who had first led me to the escarpments was near-sighted; worse, his hesitation conveyed absolutely that he did not clearly read—could only guess—what my loin cloth and headband patterns foretold. With more of a shock than I realized at the moment, I understood the knowledge of all Foremen—and by extension all Management—was approximation, myth. Furthermore, in his moments of hesitation, my Foreman seemed incredibly old.

"Cer-tain-ly!" and I heard false enthusiasm. "She reads, 'new assignment'. Hah?"

Because I had grown to full manhood on the escarpments and had survived, I expected change; yes, and also reward and recognition. Yet because I had been taught so, at that moment I felt nothing at all. Thus my deeply protective reply was very much the tone of my Foreman.

"So: tomorrow is my time?"

Abruptly, he turned from me.

First he seemed an abnormally tall figure, his shadow massive, blue; then he was only a man growing smaller as he walked almost furtively back across the shimmering, absolute stones of the Plaza.

Because he had told me nothing, I called out.

He did not turn back.

Without thinking, I trotted across the Plaza, towards him and the first row of little houses where the Foremen lived with their "wives." I touched his shoulder.

Startled, he drew back. Fear was what I saw in his face, and in the gesture of his upraised arm. I had crossed their Plaza, had touched him. Because of my audacity, he drew back.

"Am I a Foreman?" I asked, "with house?"

He stepped back to the front steps of what might be his own "home." Because all windows in all the small houses were dark, I thought, *Why no one at all lives here. These are only house fronts. These doors lead only to other quarters, perhaps into barrack-caves.*

Far down the production lines an extraordinary flash of blue light illuminated his face, the house fronts, and his door.

"You ... you have done well."

"Then a wife assigned?"

Harshly, in the dialect of all Management, he both spoke, and turned from me.

With one futile disengaging motion of arm and shoulder, he disappeared through the door.

And of course I never saw him again.

Bent low, I trotted back across the Plaza to the place where I belonged. If anything, I felt bereaved, desolate, as though suddenly on some high, rotting escarpment I had become afraid. As I reached the safety of our barrack-cave, the device in my arm began to play softly: music for marching, and also music for sleeping.

I awoke beside Kiln 82-B

That is to say, I came to understanding through work on our production lines. My loin-cloth patterns took me not to a small, white Foreman's house but to three years and 40 days as lead-off man beside the fire doors.

Past daybreak one day in spring our crew of men entered the firing shed; at the same moment, the crew-women also arrived through their portal.

Our procedure was exact. Each man of our crew placed carefully one molded, white-square of clay on the firing rack. The

women opposite scribed the day's pattern and "fed" the clay with a brush and red-vitreous glaze. Whereupon Caliper-men thoughtfully measured each brick and each row of bricks, trying without rancor to find their own quota of "Second-Forms." Nimble, within the permitted time-frame, tier-upon-tier the pallets rose as high as our tallest man could reach. For the firing run all pallets required perfect alignment.

The Talley-men, those roving jackals with clipboard and abacus, came and went; our Foreman with his symbolic, lashless whip of porcelain stood high above on his platform, never smiling.

Beyond my lead-off station, always, I was aware of the curved door of our furnace and of the fires within. At a signal from the platform above, I rolled back our furnace doors. One crew on either side, together, we pushed forward the wheeled truck of perfectly aligned, unfired bricks. When the heat caused the others to fall back, I, alone, pushed the load deeper into the furnace. Then I, too, was outside, and the door of the kiln slammed shut, then locked.

At once we walked all in a row to the rear of that somberly roaring kiln. We pulled forth an incandescent, square honeycomb of new bricks which glowed among us like the sun.

To see an aligned, glowing dolly of bricks emerge triumphant from its week-long fire made us cry out in an almost indescribable joy. As we watched, still another crew pushed that truck—glowing steadily, turning red—towards cooling yards. Always we watched the square of light grow smaller until it was only a firefly disappearing. Outside everything was dark as pitch.

At such a moment we met.

To "meet," however, implies special circumstance. To be sure I had seen her each day for almost three years, but precisely because each worker inexorably was at one with our production, with the ideology of our Valley, the distinctions between men and women, while on the production lines, long ago had ceased to exist. With that distinction vanished, we spoke to one another only in quota-words, or by communal song. Thus to see another person or to touch accidentally across a pallet of clay was not at all to "meet."

As had happened before, exactly when the last pallet of the day emerged from our kiln, I had a terrible moment of vision. Three times before when I looked into the flames, unmistakably I saw my own face. That day, however, writhing, as though sculptured in flame, I saw the outline of my whole body, complete with loin-cloth patterns.

Blind, stricken, I fell down in the monstrous blue shadow of our Whip's platform. For one moment he too was blinded by the fiery sun of new bricks emerging.

"You do ..." was what she said very softly, her face partly averted. "More ..."

What she said was illicit, and also not possible—that anyone could do "more"; yet secretly, I knew in my own heart what she dared say was true.

"More than anyone . . ."

The movements of my body had told her so: at the furnace door, then deeper into the flames than anyone else, I dared push our pallets; on the production line, at times I was an Eagle still, high on the escarpment's most daring walls. And this, secretly, she had understood. As it had been so very long ago when I had seen a Foreman's profile against blue light, so was it with her at that moment: her profile against the kiln's subdued, overhead glow, her lips half-open.

We did not touch.

Instead, impulsively, she picked up the end of my loin cloth. Intently, her face without expression, she held the pattern of her loin cloth in parallel to mine. Never before had I seen a woman's hand do something so intensely feminine.

In the shadow of the platform above, at a moment when even the Talley-men were blinded, on shards of old brick, illicitly and contrary to Law and in the face of death by burning, she kissed me.

Terror was what I felt, and the Valley suddenly seemed to tremble because of our unplanned disobedience. Then as though we had passed only in those shadows, we stood apart, stepped back into our respective lines.

In the next weeks, two things happened.

At Kiln 82-B my personal effort—a concept not before known to me—redoubled. I sensed new, illicit purpose. I pushed our piled-high carts of unfired bricks almost into the very heart of the awful flames. Secondly, in ways I had not thought possible, she managed to put glaze on almost every brick which I placed on any pallet. No word was spoken, yet our work seemed to be for ourselves alone. And it was true: she managed to let others place her just beyond my touch, and yet I could observe her closely.

Of course we had no names, and outwardly she was precisely as all other women I had ever seen except in the center of her black, long hair was an enigmatic skein of ash-white. When the heat of the kiln blew her hair back across her shoulders, that line of color glowed and floated as I watched. Clearly that mark was her disqualification to bear children. Furthermore, I saw now a destructive, impulsive aspect of her work. She was wasteful of glaze, and at day's end impulsively threw down the honored tools of her craft. But would she, ever, see her own face in this consuming flame? I could not know the answer.

After six weeks we met again in the darkness beneath a Talley-man's decorated platform, our feet bare on shards of brick.

With absolute disdain for the symbolic porcelain whip above us, she said, "Tomorrow, I go down . . . to the cedar forests."

Terror was what I felt. Even with the Talley-man directly overhead I might have cried out but she touched me, placed her blunt, short fingers across my lips.

Far down the tracks towards the cooling sheds, we saw our last dolly of bricks glowing, becoming smaller in the exceptional,

somehow comforting, darkness.

Without saying anything, she turned towards the receding light, and because of love for her I took the second step. We were two shadows running, following the narrow rails onward. Then we were going underneath vast, half submerged sheds, their roofs held up by massive columns of brick.

Suddenly, ahead, the glowing, honeycomb of fired bricks flared, went out: the tracks had abruptly turned. Because it was totally dark, we walked more slowly. Underfoot were shards of pottery, of brick; overhead we saw massive savagely decorated platforms where once Foremen and Talley-men austere watched. These platforms from another age were now impotent, deserted, were falling down.

Beside a low final tower we emerged beneath the sky and climbed the rough-hewn, primal steps to an upper platform. Stretched out ahead in the moonlight, humped like the back of some sleeping, vicious animal, I saw the roof of cooling sheds stretching away.

In full flight, with no guide save the escarpment to the East, gradually we went towards the docks, the shipping yards. On either side we passed between pallets of stacked-up bricks with three holes, then past canted stacks of jugs in a hundred sizes, all with three handles. Gradually these piles became smaller, the sheds more haphazard. After four miles, the shed roofs were rotted, or blown away, the abandoned roof posts no taller than my waist. At last even the posts were only piles of rubble, covered by silt or by clay blown here by the winds . . .

On a rise of ground beyond the vast vestige of those mounds, at two o'clock in the morning, we stopped. For a moment we turned, looked back. Beneath the sky we saw blue and orange organ pipes of flame, a mosaic of streets and plazas, the row-upon-row of mighty kilns, the entire Valley a hearth glowing—the place where we were born. Ahead was only a canyon of stone, a prelude to the chaos of mountains.

Listening intently, we heard for the last time the far-off, sweet, industrial hum rising from the Valley of the Kilns. We felt bereft, but we did not turn back. What I saw next made all of the difference.

When we fled the kilns, I feared the areas of the Yards, and the River docks. Here the Talley-men roved with their giant, three-eyed dogs. These areas were central to our enterprise, to our dogma: our crews in the forest, on the escarpment, beside the kilns, or in the vast network of cooling sheds; yes, and our myriad of quotas, our athletic games when we ran long distances carrying heavy weights, and most especially the patterns programmed into our loin cloths.

This we believed: from our yards and docks—made Holy by Shardsmen—our tile and our brick moved onward to construct walls and fantastic cities high on mountain tops we had never seen. These things known were the end, the justification of all our sacrifice.

Yet here, beyond the most savage, burnt-out cooling sheds, there were no railway yards. No docks. Where rail yards might have been, I saw only ancient, low ridges coming together. These ridges intersecting might once have been a primitive system of dikes, or canals, or possibly roadbeds—now abandoned, now overgrown.

What might have been rails, or steel shining, was only dew on ground-running tendrils reflecting the light of the moon, or reflecting the kiln-flames from the Valley itself. Beneath vines, beneath wind-blown gorse, I sensed there were only incredibly ancient rows of crude bricks which of their own weight and a thousand years of rain, were sinking inexorably into the earth from whence they came.

Stupefied, unable to speak, I sat down on a low turtle-shaped mound of pottery shards—said nothing at all. As in a moment of vision, all the things heretofore, not known or taken on faith in all my life seemed suddenly to become clear. In that terrible moment, I came truly to light. I understood. After this knowledge there was no forgiveness.

I looked up. I intended to share with her my revelation.

In her face I saw something both significant and terrible. She was sitting erect, smiling. Her face in the moonlight was full of another kind of wonder, an expression I knew too well. Although she saw what I saw, her mind, her imagination, was different. She had never been on the high escarpments. Therefore I understood she did in fact see "railroad yards." She saw what she had to see: docks, barges, and long lines of freight cars rolling. Her faith was absolute; she had never seen her own face burning like a rose inside a kiln. Only because of me she had come here, because of love.

Perhaps we might have returned the way we came. With good fortune, I might have lived out life in the kilns, silent, an outcast because of my fatal knowledge, awaiting my final years as a toothless, muttering grader of shards. Perhaps her spirit really was the spirit of the cedar forests; perhaps there was Justice after all, in the pattern of our loin cloths . . .

But we did not turn back.

I pointed ahead to a low notch in a wall, and to the dark canyon of stone beyond.

With impulsive, almost childish glee, with her long, black hair blowing in the first wind of morning, she took my hand. She raised me to my feet. She laughed and I laughed and as we ran the longest journey of our life began.

The sun rose. As we paused for the last time to look back, far away and far below, I saw the high escarpments turn for one moment into the flame.

The path leading always upward took us between flowers and across the first high-mountain meadow. There in a grove of sweet, low-growing pines for the first time, we made love and then slept in each other's arms until the sun was overhead.

AN
ORSON
SCOTT CARD
CELEBRATION

erson Scott Card has always been a gentle person. As a child he never tortured cats, never got in a schoolyard fistfight, never enjoyed stepping on worms on the sidewalk after a rainstorm. Life has also been kind to him. No one he has known intimately has died. Why, then, do cruelty and death pervade his stories?

Card does not litter the stage with corpses like an Elizabethan tragedian. He does not celebrate gore. Instead, death arrives in his stories like the finale of a dance, and cruelty is a rite by which the victim becomes ennobled or, at least, justified.

It is no coincidence that the central ritual of Christianity memorializes an unspeakably cruel death; that it enacts symbolic cannibalism; that it explicitly has to do with the forgiveness of sin. Card, a Mormon, grew up surrounded by stories of exquisite suffering and rituals even more symbolically violent than the Eucharist. Without attempting to write Christian allegory, he has inevitably reached into himself for rites that feel important and true, for deaths that seem to accomplish something.

The result is a story like "Quietus," where death must be held at bay until it is bearable; or "Fat Farm," in which a man must, to his own surprise, pay the price of his hedonism; or "Saint Amy's Tale," in which a woman learns the cost of being an angel. In every case, the central act or acts of cruelty, the important deaths, are voluntary, and all make some difference in the world.

So even where the ending is hard for a sympathetic reader to bear, even where the tale seems to assert that victory and survival are mutually exclusive, Card never writes stories of despair. His tales are ultimately hopeful. His characters do make a difference in their worlds, and the reader is made better for having lived with them awhile.





FAT FARM

*He was grossly fat, tired
and old when he went in. He came out
a new man — for a price*

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

The receptionist was surprised that he was back so soon.

"Why, Mr. Barth, how glad I am to see you," she said.

"Surprised, you mean," Barth answered. His voice rumbled from the rolls of fat under his chin.

"Delighted."

"How long has it been?" Barth asked.

"Three years. How time flies."

The receptionist smiled, but Barth saw the awe and revulsion on her face as she glanced over his immense body. In her job she saw fat people every day. But Barth knew he was unusual. He was proud of being unusual.

"Back to the fat farm," he said, laughing.

The effort of laughing made him short of breath, and he gasped for air as she pushed a button and said, "Mr. Barth is back."

He did not bother to look for a chair. No chair could hold him. He did lean against a wall, however. Standing was a labor he preferred to avoid.

Yet it was not shortness of breath or exhaustion at the slightest effort that had brought him back to Anderson's Fitness Center. He had often been fat before, and he rather relished the sensation of bulk, the impression he made as crowds parted for him. He pitied those who could only be slightly fat — short people, who were not able to bear the weight. At well over two meters, Barth could get gloriously fat, stunningly fat. He owned thirty wardrobes and took delight in changing from one to another as his belly and buttocks and thighs grew. At times he felt that if he grew large enough, he could take over the world, be the world. At the dinner table he was a conqueror to rival Genghis Khan.

It was not his fatness, then, that had brought him in. It was that at last the fat was interfering with his other pleasures. The girl he had been with the night before

PAINTING BY FERNANDO BOTERO

had tried and tried, but he was incapable—a sign that it was time to renew, refresh, reduce.

"I am a man of pleasure," he wheezed to the receptionist, whose name he never bothered to learn. She smiled back.

"Mr. Anderson will be here in a moment."

"Isn't it ironic," he said, "that a man such as I, who is capable of fulfilling every one of his desires, is never satisfied?" He gasped with laughter again. "Why haven't we ever slept together?" he asked.

She looked at him, irritation crossing her face. "You always ask that, Mr. Barth, on your way in. But you never ask it on your way out."

True enough. When he was on his way out of the Anderson Fitness Center, she never seemed as attractive as she had on his way in.

Anderson came in, effusively handsome, gushingly warm, taking Barth's fleshy hand in his and pumping it with enthusiasm.

"One of my best customers," he said.

"The usual," Barth said.

"Of course," Anderson answered. "But the price has gone up."

"If you ever go out of business," Barth said, following Anderson into the inner rooms, "give me plenty of warning. I only let myself go this much because I know you're here."

"Oh," Anderson chuckled. "We'll never go out of business."

"I have no doubt you could support your whole organization on what you charge me."

"You're paying for much more than the simple service we perform. You're also paying for privacy. Our, shall we say, lack of government intervention."

"How many of the bastards do you bribe?"

"Very few, very few. Partly because so many high officials also need our service."

"No doubt."

"It isn't just weight gains that bring people to us, you know. It's cancer and aging and accidental disfigurement. You'd be surprised to learn who has had our service."

Barth doubted that he would. The couch was ready for him, immense and soft and angled so that it would be easy for him to get up again.

"Damn near got married this time," Barth said, by way of conversation.

Anderson turned to him in surprise.

"But you didn't?"

"Of course not. Started getting fat, and she couldn't cope."

"Did you tell her?"

"That I was getting fat? It was obvious."

"About us, I mean."

"I'm not a fool."

Anderson looked relieved. "Can't have rumors getting around among the thin and young, you know."

"Still, I think I'll look her up again, afterward. She did things to me a woman shouldn't be able to do. And I thought I was jaded."

Anderson placed a tight-fitting rubber cap over Barth's head.

"Think your key thought," Anderson reminded him.

Key thought. At first that had been such a comfort, to make sure that not one iota of his memory would be lost. Now it was boring, almost juvenile. Key thought. Do you have your own Captain Aardvark secret decoder ring? Be the first on your block. The only thing Barth had been the first on his block to do was reach puberty. He had also been the first on his block to reach one hundred fifty kilos.

How many times have I been here? he wondered as the tingling in his scalp began. This is the eighth time. Eight times, and my fortune is larger than ever, the kind of wealth that takes on a life of its own. I can keep this up forever, he thought, with relish. Forever at the supper table with neither worries nor restraints. "It's dangerous to gain so much weight," Lynette had said. "Heart attacks, you know." But the only

*And just as he had done
the last time, he
touched the naked young
Barth, stroked the
smooth and lovely skin,
and finally embraced
him. And the young Barth
embraced him back.*

things that Barth worried about were hemorrhoids and impotence. The former was a nuisance, but the latter made life unbearable and drove him back to Anderson.

Key thought. What else? Lynette, standing naked on the edge of the cliff with the wind blowing. She was courting death, and he admired her for it, almost hoped that she would find it. She despised safety precautions. Like clothing, they were restrictions to be cast aside. She had once talked him into playing tag with her on a construction site, racing along the girders in the darkness, until the police came and made them leave. That had been when Barth was still thin from his last time at Anderson's. But it was not Lynette on the girders that he held in his mind. It was Lynette, fragile and beautiful Lynette, daring the wind to snatch her from the cliff and break up her body on the rocks by the river.

Even that, Barth thought, would be a kind of pleasure. A new kind of pleasure, to taste a grief so magnificently, so admirably earned.

And then the tingling in his head stopped. Anderson came back in.

"Already?" Barth asked.

"We've streamlined the process," Anderson carefully peeled the cap from Barth's head, helped the immense man lift himself from the couch.

"I can't understand why it's illegal," Barth said. "Such a simple thing."

"Oh, there are reasons. Population control, that sort of thing. This is a kind of immortality, you know. But it's mostly the repugnance most people feel. They can't face the thought. You're a man of rare courage."

But it was not courage, Barth knew. It was pleasure. He eagerly anticipated seeing, and they did not make him wait.

"Mr. Barth, meet Mr. Barth."

It nearly broke his heart to see his own body young and strong and beautiful again, as it never had been the first time through his life. It was unquestionably himself, however, that they led into the room. Except that the belly was firm, the thighs well muscled but slender enough that they did not meet, even at the crotch. They brought him in naked, of course. Barth insisted on it.

He tried to remember the last time. Then he had been the one coming from the learning room, emerging to see the immense fat man that all his memories told him was himself. Barth remembered that it had been a double pleasure, to see the mountain he had made of himself, yet to view it from inside this beautiful young body.

"Come here," Barth said, his own voice arousing echoes of the last time, when it had been the other Barth who had said it. And just as that other had done the last time, he touched the naked young Barth, stroked the smooth and lovely skin, and finally embraced him.

And the young Barth embraced him back, for that was the way of it. No one loved Barth as much as Barth did, thin or fat, young or old. Life was a celebration of Barth; the sight of himself was his strongest nostalgia.

"What did I think of?" Barth asked.

The young Barth smiled into his eyes. "Lynette," he said. "Naked on a cliff. The wind blowing. And the thought of her thrown to her death."

"Will you go back to her?" Barth asked his young self eagerly.

"Perhaps. Or to someone like her." And Barth saw with delight that the mere thought of it had aroused his young self more than a little.

"He'll do," Barth said, and Anderson handed him the simple papers to sign—papers that would never be seen in a court of law because they attested to Barth's own compliance in and initiation of an act that was second only to murder in the lawbooks of every state.

"That's it, then," Anderson said, turning from the fat Barth to the young, thin one. "You're Mr. Barth now, in control of his wealth and his life. Your clothing is in the next room."

"I know where it is," the young Barth said with a smile, and his footsteps were

buoyant as he left the room. He would dress quickly and leave the Fitness Center briskly, hardly noticing the rather plain-looking receptionist, except to take note of her wistful look after him, a tall, slender, beautiful man who had, only moments before, been lying mindless in storage, waiting to be given a mind and a memory, waiting for a fat man to move out of the way so he could fill his space.

In the memory room Barth sat on the edge of the couch, looking at the door, and then realized, with surprise, that he had no idea what came next.

"My memories run out here," Barth said to Anderson. "The agreement was—what was the agreement?"

"The agreement was tender care of you until you passed away."

"Ah, yes."

"The agreement isn't worth a damn thing," Anderson said, smiling.

Barth looked at him with surprise. "What do you mean?"

"There are two options, Barth. A needle within the next fifteen minutes. Or employment."

"What are you talking about?"

"You didn't think we'd waste time and effort feeding you the ridiculous amounts of food you require, did you?"

Barth felt himself sink inside. This was not what he had expected, though he had not honestly expected anything. Barth was not the kind to anticipate trouble. Life had never given him much trouble.

"A needle?"

"Cyanide, if you insist, though we'd rather be able to vivisection you and get as many useful body parts as we can. Your body's still fairly young. We can get incredible amounts of money for your pelvis and your glands, but they have to be taken from you alive."

"What are you talking about? This isn't what we agreed."

"I agreed to nothing with you, my friend," Anderson said, smiling. "I agreed with Barth. And Barth just left the room."

"Call him back! I insist—"

"Barth doesn't give a damn what happens to you."

And he knew that it was true.

"You said something about employment."

"Indeed."

"What kind of employment?"

Anderson shook his head. "It all depends," he said.

"On what?"

"On what kind of work turns up. There are several assignments every year that must be performed by a living human being, for which no volunteer can be found. No person, not even a criminal, can be compelled to do them."

"And I?"

"Will do them. Or one of them, rather, since you rarely get a second job."

"How can you do this? I'm a human being!"

Anderson shook his head. "The law says

that there is only one possible Barth in all the world. And you aren't it. You're just a number. And a letter. The letter H."

"Why H?"

"Because you're such a disgusting glutton, my friend. Even our first customers haven't got past C yet."

Anderson left then, and Barth was alone in the room. Why hadn't he anticipated this? Of course, of course, he shouted to himself now. Of course they wouldn't keep him pleasantly alive. He wanted to get up and try to run. But walking was difficult for him; running would be impossible. He sat there, his belly pressing heavily on his thighs, which were spread wide by the fat. He stood, with great effort, and could only waddle because his legs were so far apart, so constrained in their movement.

This has happened every time. Barth thought. Every damn time I've walked out of this place young and thin, I've left behind someone like me, and they've had their way, haven't they? His hands trembled badly.

*Then they found
him and brought him back,
weary and despairing,
and forced him to finish
a day's work in
the field before letting
him rest. And even
then the lash . . . bit deep.*

He wondered what he had decided before and knew immediately that there was no decision to make at all. Some fat people might hate themselves and choose death for the sake of having a thin version of themselves live on. But not Barth. Barth could never choose to cause himself any pain. And to obliterate even an illegal, clandestine version of himself—impossible. Whatever else he might be, he was still Barth. The man who walked out of the memory room a few minutes before had not taken over Barth's identity. He had only duplicated it. *They've stolen my soul with mirrors, Barth told himself. I have to get it back.*

"Anderson!" Barth shouted. "Anderson! I've made up my mind."

It was not Anderson who entered, of course. Barth would never see Anderson again. It would have been too tempting to try to kill him.

"Get to work, H!" the old man shouted from the other side of the field.

Barth leaned on his hoe a moment more, then got back to work, scraping weeds from between the potato plants. The calluses on his hands had long since shaped

themselves to fit the wooden handle, and his muscles knew how to perform the work without Barth's having to think about it at all. Yet that made the labor no easier. When he first realized that they meant him to be a potato farmer, he had asked, "Is this my assignment? Is this all?" And they had laughed and told him no. "It's just preparation," they said, "to get you in shape." So for two years he had worked in the potato fields, and now he began to doubt that they would ever come back, that the potatoes would ever end.

The old man was watching, he knew. His gaze always burned worse than the sun. The old man was watching, and if Barth rested too long or too often, the old man would come to him, whip in hand, to scar him deeply, to hurt him to the soul.

He dug into the ground, chopping at a stubborn plant whose root seemed to cling to the foundation of the world. "Come up, damn you," he muttered. He thought his arms were too weak to strike harder, but he struck harder anyway. The root split, and the impact shattered him to the bone.

He was naked and brown to the point of blackness from the sun. The flesh hung loosely on him in great folds, a memory of the mountain he had been. Under the loose skin, however, he was tight and hard. It might have given him pleasure, for every muscle had been earned by hard labor and the pain of the lash. But there was no pleasure in it. The price was too high.

I'll kill myself, he often thought and thought again now with his arms trembling with exhaustion. I'll kill myself so they can't use my body and can't use my soul.

But he would never kill himself. Even now, Barth was incapable of ending it.

The farm he worked on was unfenced, but the time he had gotten away he had walked and walked and walked for three days and had not once seen any sign of human habitation other than an occasional jeep track in the sagebrush-and-grass desert. Then they found him and brought him back, weary and despairing, and forced him to finish a day's work in the field before letting him rest. And even then the lash had bitten deep, the old man laying it on with a relish that spoke of sadism or a deep, personal hatred.

But why should the old man hate me? Barth wondered. *I don't know him.* He finally decided that it was because he had been so fat, so obviously soft, while the old man was wiry to the point of being gaunt, his face pinched by years of exposure to the sunlight. Yet the old man's hatred had not diminished as the months went by and the fat melted away in the sweat and sunlight of the potato field.

A sharp sting across his back, the sound of slapping leather on skin, and then an excruciating pain deep in his muscles. He had paused too long. The old man had come to him.

The old man said nothing. Just raised the lash again, ready to strike. Barth lifted the hoe out of the ground, to start work again. It

occurred to him, as it had a hundred times before, that the hoe could reach as far as the whip, with as good effect. But, as a hundred times before, Barth looked into the old man's eyes, and what he saw there, while he did not understand it, was enough to stop him. He could not strike back. He could only endure.

The lash did not fall again. Instead he and the old man just looked at each other. The sun burned where blood was coming from his back. Flies buzzed near him. He did not bother to brush them away.

Finally the old man broke the silence.

"H," he said.

Barth did not answer. Just waited.

"They've come for you. First job," said the old man.

First job. It took Barth a moment to realize the implications. The end of the potato fields. The end of the sunlight. The end of the old man with the whip. The end of the loneliness or, at least, of the boredom.

"Thank God," Barth said. His throat was dry.

"Go wash," the old man said.

Barth carried the hoe back to the shed. He remembered how heavy the hoe had seemed when he first arrived. How ten minutes in the sunlight had made him faint. Yet they had revived him in the field, and the old man had said, "Carry it back." So he had carried back the heavy, heavy hoe, feeling for all the world like Christ bearing his cross. Soon enough the others had gone, and the old man and he had been alone together, but the ritual with the hoe never changed. They got to the shed, and the old man carefully took the hoe from him and locked it away, so that Barth couldn't get it in the night and kill him with it.

And then into the house, where Barth bathed painfully and the old man put an excruciating disinfectant on his back. Barth had long since given up on the idea of an anesthetic. It wasn't in the old man's nature to use an anesthetic.

Clean clothes. A few minutes' wait. And then the helicopter. A young, businesslike man emerged from it, looking unfamiliar in detail but very familiar in general. He was an echo of all the businesslike young men and women who had dealt with him before. The young man came to him, unsmilingly, and said, "H?"

Barth nodded. It was the only name they used for him.

"You have an assignment."

"What is it?" Barth asked.

The young man did not answer. The old man, behind him, whispered, "They'll tell you soon enough. And then you'll wish you were back here, H. They'll tell you, and you'll pray for the potato fields."

But Barth doubted it. In two years there had not been a moment's pleasure. The food was hideous, and there was never enough. There were no women, and he was usually too tired to amuse himself. Just pain and labor and loneliness, all excruciating. He would leave that now. Anything would be better, anything at all.

"Whatever they assign you, though," the old man said, "it can't be any worse than my assignment."

Barth would have asked him what his assignment had been, but there was nothing in the old man's voice that invited the question, and there was nothing in their relationship in the past that would allow the question to be asked. Instead, they stood in silence as the young man reached into the helicopter and helped a man get out. An immensely fat man, stark-naked and white as the flesh of a potato, looking petrified. The old man strode purposefully toward him.

"Hello, I," the old man said.

"My name's Barth," the fat man answered, petulantly. The old man struck him hard across the mouth, hard enough that the tender lip split and blood dripped from where his teeth had cut into the skin.

"I," said the old man, "Your name is I."

The fat man nodded pitifully, but Barth—H—felt no pity for him. Two years

• Barth watched as the old man put a hoe in the fat man's hands and drove him out into the field. Two more young men got out of the helicopter. Barth knew what they would do. •

this time. Only two damnable years and he was already in this condition. Barth could vaguely remember being proud of the mountain he had made of himself. But now he felt only contempt. Only a desire to go to the fat man, to scream in his face, "Why did you do it! Why did you let it happen again!"

It would have meant nothing. To I, as to H, it was the first time, the first betrayal. There had been no others in his memory.

Barth watched as the old man put a hoe in the fat man's hands and drove him out into the field. Two more young men got out of the helicopter. Barth knew what they would do, could almost see them helping the old man for a few days, until I finally learned the hopelessness of resistance and delay.

But Barth did not get to watch the replay of his own torture of two years before. The young man who had first emerged from the copter now led him to it, put him in a seat by a window, and sat beside him. The pilot speeded up the engines, and the copter began to rise.

"The bastard," Barth said, looking out the window at the old man as he slapped I across the face brutally.

The young man chuckled. Then he told Barth his assignment.

Barth clung to the window, looking out, feeling his life slip away from him even as the ground receded slowly. "I can't do it."

"There are worse assignments," the young man said.

Barth did not believe it.

"If I live," he said, "if I live, I want to come back here."

"Love it that much?"

"To kill him."

The young man looked at him blankly.

"The old man," Barth explained, then realized that the young man was ultimately incapable of understanding anything. He looked back out the window. The old man looked very small next to the huge lump of white flesh beside him. Barth felt a terrible loathing for I. A terrible despair in knowing that nothing could possibly be learned, that again and again his selves would replay this hideous scenario.

Somewhere, the man who would be J was dancing, was playing polo, was seducing and perverting and being delighted by every woman and boy and, God knows, sheep that he could find; somewhere the man who would be J dined.

I bent immensely in the sunlight and tried, clumsily, to use the hoe. Then, losing his balance, he fell over into the dirt, writhing. The old man raised his whip.

The helicopter turned then, so that Barth could see nothing but sky from his window. He never saw the whip fall. But he imagined the whip falling. Imagined and relished it, longed to feel the heaviness of the blow flowing from his own arm. *Hit him again!* he cried out inside himself. *Hit him for me!* And inside himself he made the whip fall a dozen times more.

"What are you thinking?" the young man asked, smiling, as if he knew the punch line of a joke.

"I was thinking," Barth said, "that the old man can't possibly hate him as much as I do."

Apparently that was the punch line. The young man laughed uproariously. Barth did not understand the joke, but somehow he was certain that he was the butt of it. He wanted to strike out but dared not.

Perhaps the young man saw the tension in Barth's body, or perhaps he merely wanted to explain. He stopped laughing but could not repress his smile, which penetrated Barth far more deeply than the laugh.

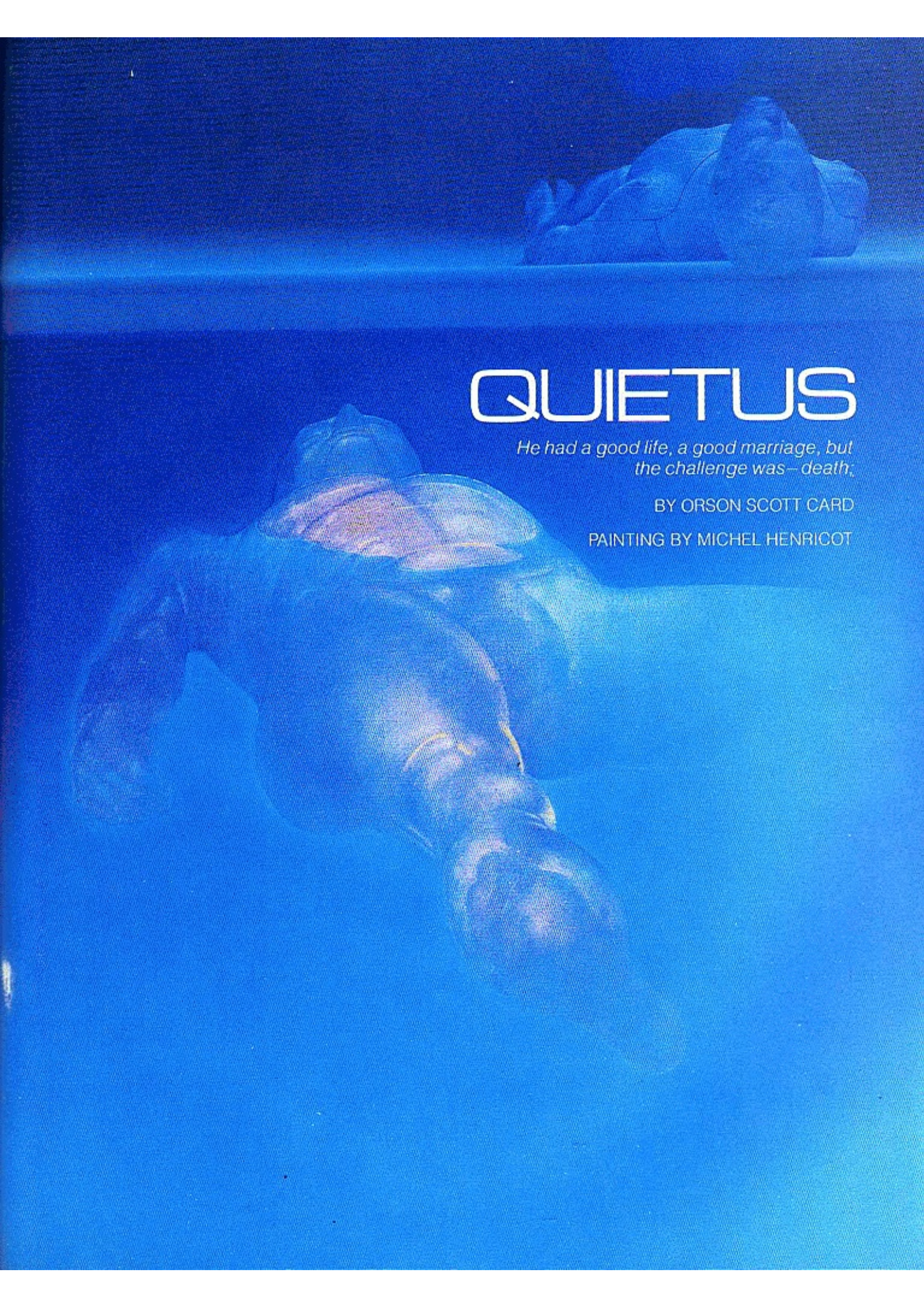
"But don't you see?" the young man asked. "Don't you know who the old man is?"

Barth didn't know.

"What do you think we did with A?" And the young man laughed again.

There are worse assignments than mine. Barth realized. And the worst of all would be to spend day after day, month after month, supervising that contemptible animal that he could not deny was himself.

The scar on his back bled a little, and the blood stuck to the seat when it dried.



QUIETUS

*He had a good life, a good marriage, but
the challenge was—death;*

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

PAINTING BY MICHEL HENRICOT

It came to him suddenly, a moment of blackness as he sat at his desk, working late. It was as quick as the blink of an eye. Before the darkness the papers on his desk had seemed terribly important, and now he stared at them blankly, wondering what they were and then realizing that he didn't really give a damn what they were and he ought to be going home now.

Ought definitely to be going home now. And C. Mark Tapworth, of CMT Enterprises, Inc., arose from his desk without finishing all the work that was on it, the first time he had done such a thing in the twelve years it had taken him to bring the company from nothing to being a multimillion-dollar-a-year business. Vaguely it occurred to him that he was not acting normally, but he didn't really care; it didn't really matter to him a bit whether any more people bought ... bought ...

And for a few seconds Tapworth could not remember what it was that his company made.

This frightened him. It reminded him that his father and his uncles had all died of strokes. It reminded him of his mother's senility at the fairly young age of sixty-eight. It reminded him of something he had always known and never quite believed; that he was mortal and that all the works of his days would gradually become more and more trivial, until his death, at which time his life itself would be his only act, a forgotten stone whose fall in the lake had set off ripples that would in time reach the shore, having made, after all, no difference.

I'm tired, he decided. MaryJo is right. I need a rest.

But he was not the resting kind, not until that moment when, standing by his desk, the blackness came again, this time a jog in his mind. And he remembered nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing, was falling interminably through nothingness.

Then, mercifully, the world returned to him and he stood trembling, regretting now the many, many nights he had stayed far too late, the many hours he had not spent with MaryJo, had left her alone in their large but childless house. And he imagined her waiting for him forever, a lonely woman dwarfed by the huge living room, waiting patiently for a husband who would, who must, who always had, come home.

Is it my heart? Or a stroke? he wondered. Whatever it was, it was enough that he saw the end of the world lurking in the darkness that had visited him, and, as for the prophet returning from the mount, things that once had mattered overmuch mattered not at all, and things he had long postponed now silently importuned him. He felt a terrible urgency that there was something he must do before—

Before what? He would not let himself answer. He just walked out through the large room full of ambitious younger men and women trying to impress him by working later than he; noticed but did not care that they were visibly relieved at their reprieve from another endless night. He

walked out, got into his car, and drove home through a thin mist of rain that made the world retreat a comfortable distance from the windows of his car.

No one ran to greet him at the door. The children must be upstairs, he realized. The children, a boy and a girl half his height and with twice his energy, were admirable creatures who ran downstairs as if they were skiing, who could hold completely still no more than a hummingbird in midair could. He could hear their footsteps upstairs, running lightly across the floor. They hadn't come to greet him at the door because things in their lives, after all, were more important than mere fathers. He smiled, set down his attaché case, and went to the kitchen.

MaryJo looked harried, upset. He recognized the signals instantly—she had cried earlier today.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said, because she always said Nothing. He knew that in a moment she would tell him. She always told him everything, which had sometimes made him impatient. Now as she moved silently back and forth from counter to counter, from cupboard to stove, making another perfect dinner, he realized that she was not going to tell him. It made him uncomfortable. He began to try to guess.

"You work too hard," he said. "I've offered to get a maid or a cook. We can certainly afford one."

MaryJo just smiled thinly. "I don't want anyone else mucking around in the kitchen," she said. "I thought we dropped that subject years ago. Did you—did you have a hard day at the office?"

Mark almost told her about his strange lapses of memory but caught himself. He would have to lead up to telling her gradually. MaryJo would not be able to cope with it, not in the state she was already in. "Not too hard. Finished up early."

"I know," she said. "I'm ... glad."

She didn't sound glad. It irritated him a little. Hurt his feelings. But instead of going off to nurse his wounds, he merely noticed his emotions as if he was a dispassionate observer. He saw himself; important self-made man, yet, at home, a little boy who could be hurt, not just by a word but by a short pause of indecision. Sensitive, sensitive; and he was amused at himself. For a moment he almost saw himself standing a few inches away, could observe the amused expression on his own face.

"Excuse me," MaryJo said, and she opened a cupboard door as he stepped out of the way. She pulled out a pressure cooker. "We're out of potato flakes," she said. "Have to do it the primitive way." She dropped the peeled potatoes into the pan.

"The children are awfully quiet today," he said. "Do you know what they're doing?"

MaryJo looked at him with a bewildered expression.

"They didn't come meet me at the door. Not that I mind. They're busy with their own

concerns. I know."

"Mark," MaryJo said.

"All right. You see through me so easily. But I was only a little hurt. I want to look through today's mail." He wandered out of the kitchen. He was vaguely aware that behind him MaryJo had started to cry again. He did not let it worry him much. She cried easily and often.

He wandered into the living room, and the furniture surprised him. He had expected to see the green sofa and chair that he had bought from Deseret Industries, and the size of the living room and the tasteful antiques looked utterly wrong. Then his mind did a quick turn, and he remembered that the old green sofa and chair were fifteen years ago, when he and MaryJo had first married. *Why did I expect to see them?* he wondered, and he worried again; worried also because he had come into the living room expecting to find the mail, even though, every day, for years, MaryJo had been putting it on his desk.

He went into his study and picked up the mail and started sorting through it until he noticed, out of the corner of one eye, that something dark and massive was blocking the lower half of one of the windows. He looked. It was a coffin, a rather plain one, sitting on a rolling table from a mortuary.

"MaryJo," he called. "MaryJo."

She came into the study, looking afraid. "Yes?"

"Why is there a coffin in my study?" he asked.

"Coffin?" she asked.

"By the window, MaryJo. How did it get here?"

She looked disturbed. "Please don't touch it," she said.

"Why not?"

"I can't stand seeing you touch it. I told them they could leave it here for a few hours. But now it looks like it has to stay all night." The idea of the coffin staying in the house any longer was obviously repugnant to her.

"Who left it here? And why us? It's not as if we're in the market. Or do they sell these at parties now, like Tupperware?"

"The bishop called and asked me—asked me to let the mortuary people leave it here for the funeral tomorrow. He said nobody could get away to unlock the church and could we take it here for a few hours—"

It occurred to him that the mortuary would not have parted with a funeral-bound coffin unless it was filled.

"MaryJo, is there a body in it?"

She nodded, and a tear slipped over her lower eyelid. He was aghast. He let himself show it. "They left a corpse in a coffin here with you all day? With the kids?"

She buried her face in her hands and ran from the room, ran upstairs.

Mark did not follow her. He stood there and regarded the coffin with distaste. At least they had the good sense to close it. But a coffin! He went to the telephone at his desk and dialed the bishop's number.

"He isn't here." The bishop's wife

sounded irritated by his call.

"He has to get this body out of my study and out of my house tonight. This is a terrible imposition."

"I don't know where to reach him. He's a doctor, you know, Brother Tapworth. He's at the hospital. Operating. There's no way I can contact him for something like this."

"So what am I supposed to do?"

She got surprisingly emotional about it. "Do what you want! Push the coffin out into the street if you want! It'll just be one more hurt to the poor man!"

"Which brings me to another question. Who is he, and why isn't his family—"

"He doesn't have a family, Brother Tapworth. And he doesn't have any money. I'm sure he regrets dying in our ward, but we just thought that even though he had no friends in the world, someone might offer him a little kindness on his way out of it."

Her intensity was irresistible, and Mark recognized the hopelessness of getting rid of the box that night. "As long as it's gone tomorrow," he said. A few amenities, and the conversation ended. Mark sat in his chair, staring angrily at the coffin. He had come home worried about his health and found a coffin to greet him when he arrived. Well, at least it explained why poor MaryJo had been so upset. He heard the children quarreling upstairs. Well, let MaryJo handle it. Their problems would take her mind off this box, anyway.

And so he sat and stared at the coffin for two hours and had no dinner and did not particularly notice when MaryJo came downstairs and took the burned potatoes out of the pressure cooker and threw the entire dinner away and lay down on the sofa in the living room and wept. He watched the patterns of the grain of the wood, as subtle as flames, winding along the coffin. He remembered having taken naps at the age of five in a makeshift bedroom behind a plywood partition in his parents' small home. Watching the wood grain there had been his way of passing the empty, sleepless hours. In those days he had been able to see shapes: clouds and faces and battles and monsters. But on the coffin the wood grain looked more complex and yet far more simple. A road map leading upward to the lid. A draft describing the decomposition of the body. A graph at the foot of the patient's bed, saying nothing to the patient but speaking death to the trained physician's mind. Mark wondered, briefly, about the bishop, who was right now operating on someone who might very well end up in just such a box as this.

And finally his eyes hurt, and he looked at the clock and felt guilty about having spent so much time closed off in his study on one of his few nights home early. He meant to get up and find MaryJo and take her up to bed. But instead he got up and went to the coffin and ran his hands along the wood. It felt like glass because the varnish was so thick and smooth. It was as if the living wood had to be kept away, pro-

tected from the touch of a hand. But the wood was not alive, was it? It was being put into the ground, also to decompose. The varnish might keep it a little longer. He thought whimsically of what it would be like to varnish a corpse, to preserve it. *The Egyptians would have nothing on us then*, he thought.

"Don't," said a husky voice from the door. It was MaryJo, her eyes red-rimmed, her face looking slept in.

"Don't what?" Mark asked her. She didn't answer, just glanced down at his hands. To his surprise, Mark noticed his thumbs were under the lip of the coffin lid, as if to lift it.

"I wasn't going to open it," he said.

"Come upstairs," MaryJo said.

"Are the children asleep?"

He had asked the question innocently, but her face was immediately twisted with pain and grief and anger.

"Children?" she asked. "What is this? And why tonight?"

He leaned against the coffin in surprise.

He went into his study and picked up the mail and . . . noticed out of the corner of one eye that something . . . was blocking . . . one of the windows. He looked. It was a coffin.

The wheeled table moved slightly under the weight of his body.

"We don't have any children," she said.

And Mark remembered with horror that she was right. After the second miscarriage, the doctor had tied her tubes, because any further pregnancies would risk her life. There were no children, none at all, and it had devastated her for years. It was only because of Mark's great patience and dependability that she had been able to stay out of the hospital. Yet when he came home tonight . . . He tried to remember what he had heard when he came home. Surely he had heard the children running back and forth upstairs. Surely . . .

"I haven't been well," he said.

"If it was a joke, it was sick."

"It wasn't a joke. It was—" But again he couldn't, or at least didn't, tell her about the strange memory lapses at the office, even though this was even more proof that something was wrong. He had never had any children in his home; MaryJo's and his brothers and sisters had all been discreetly warned not to bring children around his poor wife, who was quite distraught to be—the Old Testament word?—barren.

And all evening he had talked about having children.

"Honey, I'm sorry," he said, trying to put his whole heart into the apology.

"So am I," she answered, and she went upstairs.

Surely she isn't angry at me, Mark thought. *Surely she realizes something is wrong. Surely she'll forgive me.*

But as he climbed the stairs after her, taking off his shirt as he did, he again heard the voice of a child.

"I want a drink, Mommy." The voice was plaintive, with the sort of whine only possible to a child who is comfortable and sure of love. Mark turned at the landing in time to see MaryJo passing the top of the stairs on the way to the children's bedroom, a glass of water in her hand. He thought: nothing of it. The children always wanted extra attention at bedtime.

The children. The children. Of course there were children. This was the urgency he had felt in the office, the reason he had to get home. They had always wanted children, and so there were children. Tapworth always got what he set his heart on.

"Asleep at last," MaryJo said wearily when she came into the room.

Despite her weariness, however, she kissed him goodnight in the way that told him she wanted to make love. He had never worried much about sex. Let the readers of *Reader's Digest* worry about how to make their sex lives fuller and richer; he always said. As for him, sex was good, but not the best thing in his life: just one of the ways that he and MaryJo responded to each other. Yet tonight he was disturbed, worried. Not because he could not perform, for he had never been troubled by even temporary impotence except when he had a fever and didn't feel like sex, anyway. What bothered him was that he didn't exactly care.

He didn't not care, either. He was just going through the motions, as he had a thousand times before, and this time, suddenly, it all seemed so silly, so redolent of petting in the backseat of a car. He felt embarrassed that he should get so excited over a little stroking. So he was almost relieved when one of the children cried out. Usually he would say to ignore the cry, would insist on continuing the lovemaking. But this time he pulled away from her, put on a robe, and went into the other room to quiet the child down.

There was no other room.

Not in this house. He had, in his mind, been heading for the room filled with a crib, a changing table, a dresser, mobiles, and cheerful wallpaper. But that room had been years ago, when they were full of hope, in the small house in Sandy, not in the home in Federal Heights, with its magnificent view of Salt Lake City, its beautiful shape, and its decoration that spoke of taste and shouted of wealth and whispered faintly of loneliness and grief. He leaned against a wall. There were no children. There were no chil-

dren. He could still hear the child's cry ringing in his mind.

MaryJo stood in the doorway to their bedroom, naked but holding her nightgown in front of her. "Mark," she said. "I'm afraid."

"So am I," he answered.

But she asked him no questions, and he put on his pajamas, and they went to bed. And as he lay there in darkness, listening to his wife's faintly rasping breath, he realized that it didn't matter as much as it ought. He was losing his mind, but he didn't really care. He thought of praying about it, but he had given up praying years ago, though of course it wouldn't do to let anyone else know about his loss of faith, not in a city where it's good business to be an active Mormon. There'd be no help from God on this one, he knew. And not much help from MaryJo, either; for instead of being strong, as she usually was in an emergency, this time she would be, as she had said, afraid.

Well, so am I, Mark said to himself. He reached over and stroked his wife's shadowy cheek, realized that there were some creases near the eye, understood that what made her afraid was not his specific ailment, odd as it was, but the fact that it was a hint of aging, of senility of imminent separation. He remembered the box downstairs, like death appointed to watch for him until at last he consented to go. He briefly resented them for bringing death to his home, for so indecently imposing on them. Then he ceased to care at all—about the box, about his strange lapses in memory, about everything.

I am at peace, he thought as he drifted off to sleep. *I am at peace, and it's not all that pleasant.*

"Mark," said MaryJo, shaking him awake. "Mark, you overslept."

Mark opened his eyes, mumbled something so the shaking would stop, then rolled over to go back to sleep.

"Mark," MaryJo insisted.

"I'm tired," he said in protest.

"I know you are," she said. "So I didn't wake you any sooner. But they just called. There's something of an emergency or something—"

"They can't flush the toilet without someone holding their hands."

"I wish you wouldn't be crude, Mark," MaryJo said. "I sent the children off to school without letting them wake you by kissing you good-bye. They were very upset."

"Good children."

"Mark, they're expecting you at the office."

Mark closed his eyes and spoke in measured tones. "You can call them and tell them I'll come in when I damn well feel like it, and if they can't cope with the problem themselves, I'll fire them all."

MaryJo was silent for a moment. "Mark, I can't say that."

"Word for word. I'm tired. I need a rest. My mind is doing funny things to me." And with

that Mark remembered all the illusions of the day before, including the illusion of having children.

"There aren't any children," he said.

Her eyes grew wide. "What do you mean?"

He almost shouted at her, demanded to know what was going on, why she didn't just tell him the truth for a moment. But the lethargy and disinterest clamped down, and he said nothing, just rolled back over and looked at the curtains as they drifted in and out with the air conditioning. Soon MaryJo left him, and he heard the sound machinery starting up downstairs. The washer, the dryer, the vacuum cleaner, the dishwasher, the garbage-disposal unit. It seemed that all the machines were going at once. He had never heard the sounds before. MaryJo never ran them in the evenings or on weekends, when he was home.

At noon he finally got up, but he didn't feel like showering and shaving, though any other day he would have felt dirty and uncomfortable until those rituals were done with. He just put on his robe and went downstairs. He planned to go in to breakfast, but instead he went into his study and opened the lid of the coffin.

It took a bit of preparation, of course. There was some pacing back and forth before the coffin, and much stroking of the wood, but finally he put his thumbs under the lid and lifted.

The corpse looked stiff and awkward. A man, not particularly old, not particularly young. Hair of a determinedly average color. Except for the grayness of the skin color, the body looked completely natural and so utterly nondescript that Mark felt sure he might have seen the man a million times without remembering he had seen him at all. Yet he was unmistakably dead.

He smelled of embalming fluid.

Mark was holding the lid open with one hand, leaning on the coffin with the other. He was trembling. Yet he felt no excitement, no fear. The trembling was coming from his body, not from anything he could find within his thoughts. He was trembling because he was cold.

There was a soft sound or absence of sound at the door. He turned around abruptly. The lid dropped behind him. MaryJo was standing in the doorway, wearing a frilly housedress, her eyes wide with horror.

In that moment years fell away and to Mark she was twenty, a shy and somewhat awkward girl who was forever being surprised by the way the world actually worked. He waited for her to say, "But, Mark, you cheated him." She had said it only once, but ever since then he had heard the words in his mind whenever he was closing a deal. It was the closest thing to a conscience he had in his business dealings. It was enough to win him a reputation as a very honest man.

"Mark," she said softly, as if struggling to keep control of herself. "Mark, I couldn't go

on without you."

She sounded as if she was afraid something terrible was going to happen to him, and her hands were shaking. He took a step toward her. She lifted her hands, came to him, clung to him, and cried in a high whimper into his shoulder. "I couldn't. I just couldn't."

"You don't have to," he said, puzzled.

"I'm just not the kind of person," she said between sobs, "who can live alone."

"But even if I—even if something happened to me, MaryJo, you'd have the—" He was going to say "children." Something was wrong with that, though, wasn't there? They loved no one better in the world than their children; no parents had ever been happier than they had been when their two were born. Yet he couldn't say it.

"I'd have what?" MaryJo asked. "Oh, Mark, I'd have nothing."

And then Mark remembered again (*What's happening to me?*) that they were childless, that to MaryJo, who was old-fashioned enough to regard motherhood as the main purpose for her existence, the fact that they had no hope of children was God's condemnation of her. The only thing that had pulled her through after the operation was Mark, was fussing over his meaningless and sometimes invented problems at the office or telling him endlessly the events of her lonely days. It was as if he were her anchor to reality, and only he kept her from going adrift in the eddies of her own fears. No wonder the poor girl (for at such times Mark could not think of her as completely adult) was distraught as she thought of Mark's death, and the damned coffin in the house did no good at all.

But I'm in no position to cope with this, Mark thought. *I'm falling apart. I'm not only forgetting things, I'm remembering things that didn't happen. And what if I died? What if I suddenly had a stroke like my father had and died on the way to the hospital? What would happen to MaryJo?*

She'd never lack for money. Between the business and the insurance, even the house would be paid off, with enough money left over for her to live like a queen on the interest. But would the insurance company arrange for someone to hold her patiently while she cried out her fears? Would they provide someone for her to waken in the middle of the night, when nameless terrors haunted her?

Her sobs turned into frantic hiccups and her fingers dug more deeply into his back through the soft fabric of his robe. See how she clings to me, he thought. *She'll never let me go.* And then the blackness came again, and again he was falling backward into nothing, and again he did not care about anything. Did not even know there was anything to care about.

Except for the fingers pressing into his back and the weight he held in his arms. *I do not mind losing the world,* he thought. *I do not mind losing even my memories of the past. But these fingers. This woman. I cannot lay this burden down, because*

there is no one who can pick it up again. If I release her, she is lost.

Yet he longed for the darkness, resented her need that held him. Surely there is a way out of this, he thought. Surely a balance between two hungers that leaves both satisfied. But still the hands held him. All the world was silent, and the silence was peace except for the sharp, insistent fingers, and he cried out in frustration. And the sound was still ringing in the room when he opened his eyes and saw MaryJo standing against a wall, leaning against the wall, looking at him in terror.

"What's wrong?" she whispered.

"I'm losing," he answered. But he could not remember what he had thought to win.

And at that moment a door slammed in the house and Amy came running with little loud feet through the kitchen and into the study, flinging herself on her mother and bellowing about the day at school and the dog that chased her for the second time and how the teacher told her she was the best reader in the second grade but Darrel had spilled milk on her and could she have a sandwich because she had dropped hers and stepped on it accidentally at lunch—

MaryJo looked at Mark cheerfully and winked and laughed. "Sounds like Amy's had a busy day, doesn't it, Mark?"

Mark could not smile. He just nodded as MaryJo straightened Amy's disheveled clothing and led her toward the kitchen.

"MaryJo," Mark said. "There's something I have to talk to you about."

"Can it wait?" MaryJo asked, not even pausing. Mark heard the cupboard door opening, heard the lid come off the peanut-butter jar, heard Amy giggle and say, "Mommy, not so thick."

Mark didn't understand why he was so confused and terrified. Amy had a sandwich after school ever since she had started going—even as an infant she had had seven meals a day and never gained an ounce. It wasn't what was happening in the kitchen that was bothering him, it couldn't be. Yet he could not stop himself from crying out, "MaryJo! MaryJo, come here!"

"Is Daddy mad?" he heard Amy ask softly.

"No," MaryJo answered, and she bustled back into the room and impatiently said, "What's wrong, dear?"

"I just need—just need to have you in here for a minute."

"Really, Mark, that's not your style, is it? Amy needs to have a lot of attention right after school. It's the way she is. I wish you wouldn't stay home from work with nothing to do, Mark. You become quite impossible around the house." She smiled to show that she was only half-serious and left again to go back to Amy.

For a moment Mark felt a terrible stab of jealousy that MaryJo was far more sensitive to Amy's needs than to his.

But that jealousy passed quickly, like the

memory of the pain of MaryJo's fingers pressing into his back, and with a tremendous feeling of relief Mark didn't care about anything at all, and he turned around to the coffin, which fascinated him, and he opened the lid again and looked inside. It was as if the poor man had no face at all, Mark realized. As if death stole faces from people and made them anonymous even to themselves.

He ran his fingers back and forth across the satin, and it felt cool and inviting. The rest of the room, the rest of the world, faded. Only Mark and the coffin and the corpse remained, and Mark felt very tired and very hot, as if life itself were a terrible friction making heat within him, and he took off his robe and pajamas and awkwardly climbed on a chair and stepped over the edge into the coffin and knelt and then lay down in the coffin. There was no corpse to share the slight space with him, nothing between his body and the cold satin, and as he lay on it, it didn't get any warmer because at last the friction was slowing, was cooling, and he reached up and pulled down the lid. The world was dark and silent, and there was no odor and no taste and no feel but the cold of the sheets.

"Why is the lid closed?" asked little Amy, holding her mother's hand.

"Because it's not the body we must remember," MaryJo said softly with careful control, "but the way Daddy always was.

We must remember him happy and laughing and loving us."

Amy looked puzzled. "But I remember he spanked me."

MaryJo nodded, smiling, something she had not done recently. "It's all right to remember that, too," MaryJo said, and then she took her daughter from the coffin back into the living room, where Amy, not realizing yet the terrible loss she had sustained, laughed and climbed on Grandpa.

David, his face serious and tear-stained because he did understand, came and put his hand in his mother's hand and held tightly to her. "We'll be fine," he said.

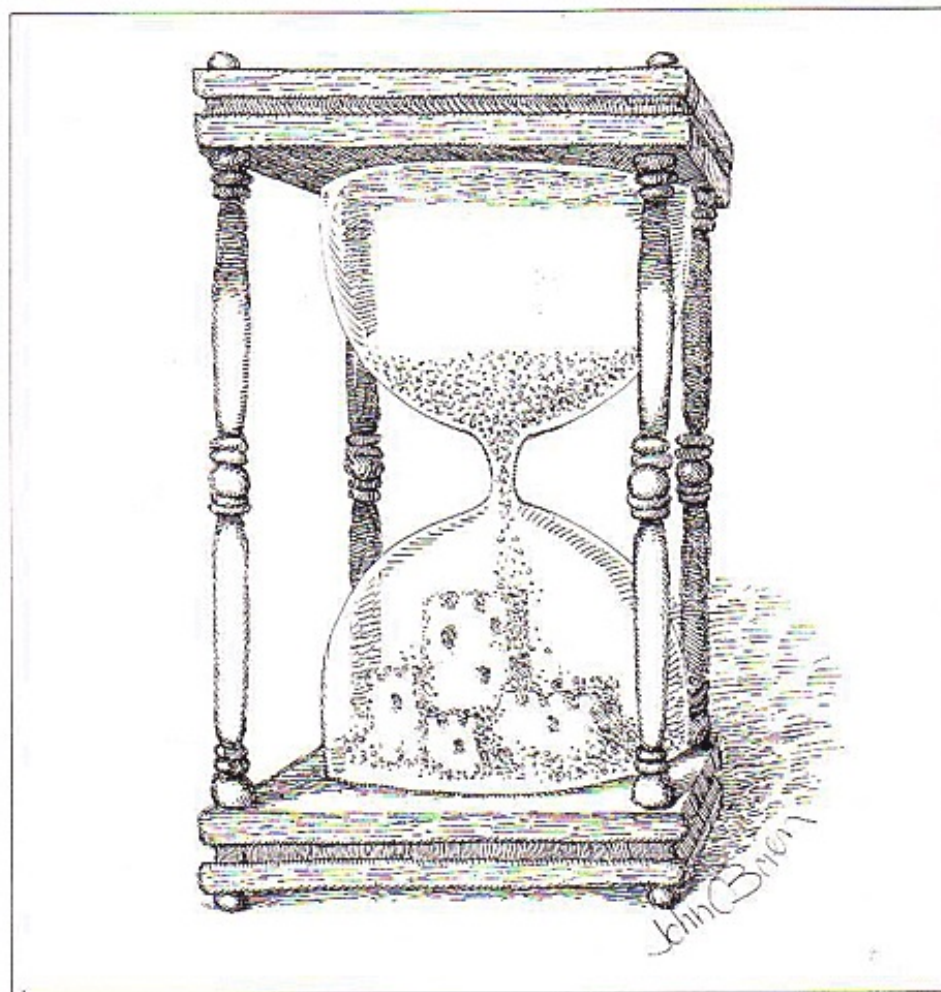
"Yes," MaryJo answered. "I think so."

And MaryJo's mother whispered in her ear, "I don't know how you can stand it so bravely, my dear."

Tears came to MaryJo's eyes. "I'm not brave at all," she whispered back. "But the children. They depend on me so much. I can't let go when they're leaning on me."

"How terrible it would be," her mother said, nodding wisely, "if you had no children."

Inside the coffin, his last need fulfilled, Mark Tapworth heard it all but could not hold it in his mind, for in his mind there was space and time for only one thought: consent. Everlasting consent to his life, to his death, to the world, and to the everlasting absence of the world. For now at last there were children.





*Mission completed, the Wreckers
were poised to land and
rebuild on the ruins of their old world*

ST. AMY'S TALE

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

Mother could kill with her hands. Father could fly. These are miracles. But they were not miracles then. Mother Elouise taught me that there were no miracles then.

I am the child of Wreckers, born while the angel was in them. This is why I am called Saint Amy, though I perceive nothing in me that should make me holier than any other old woman. Yet Mother Elouise denied the angel in her, too, and it was no less there.

Sift your fingers through the soil, all you who read my words. Take your spades of iron and your picks of stone. Dig deep. You will find no ancient works of man hidden there. For the Wreckers passed through the world, and all the vanity was consumed in fire; all the pride broke in pieces when it was smitten by God's shining hand.

Elouise leaned on the rim of the computer keyboard. All around her the machinery was alive, the screens displaying information rapidly, as if they knew they were the last of the machines and this the last of the information. Elouise felt nothing but weariness. She was leaning because, for a moment, she had felt a frightening vertigo. As if the world underneath the airplane had dissolved and slipped away into a rapidly receding star and she would never be able to land.

True enough, she thought, *I'll never be able to land, not in the world I knew.*

"Getting sentimental about the old computers?"

Elouise, startled, turned in her chair and faced her husband, Charlie. At that moment the airplane lurched, but, like sailors accustomed to the shifting of the sea, they adjusted unconsciously and did not notice the imbalance.

"Is it noon already?" she asked.

"It's the moral equivalent of noon. I'm too tired to fly this thing anymore, and

PAINTING BY EVELYN TAYLOR

it's a good thing Bill's at the controls."

"Hungry?"

Charlie shook his head. "But Amy probably is," he said.

"Voyeur," said Elouise.

Charlie liked to watch Elouise nurse their daughter. But despite her accusation, Elouise knew there was nothing sexual in it. Charlie liked the idea of Elouise being Amy's mother. He liked the way Amy's sucking resembled the sucking of a calf or a lamb or a puppy. He had said, "It's the best thing we kept from the animals. The best thing we didn't throw away."

"Better than sex?" Elouise had asked. And Charlie had only smiled.

Amy was playing with a rag doll in the only large clear space in the airplane, near the exit door. "Mommy Mommy Mamommy Mommy-o," Amy said. The child stood and reached to be picked up. Then she saw Charlie. "Daddy Addy Addy."

"Hi," Charlie said.

"Hi," Amy answered. "Ha-ee." She had only just learned to close the diphthong, and she exaggerated it. Amy played with the buttons on Elouise's shirt, trying to undo them.

"Greedy," Elouise said, laughing.

Charlie unbuttoned the shirt for her, and Amy seized on the nipple after only one false grab. She sucked noisily, tapping her hand gently against Elouise's breast as she ate.

"I'm glad we're so near finished," Elouise said. "She's too old to be nursing now."

"That's right. Throw the little bird out of the nest."

"Go to bed," Elouise said.

Amy recognized the phrase. She pulled away. "La-lo," she said.

"That's right. Daddy's going to sleep," Elouise said.

Elouise watched as Charlie stripped off most of his clothing and lay down on the pad. He smiled once, then turned over, and was immediately asleep. He was in tune with his body. Elouise knew that he would awaken in exactly six hours, when it was time for him to take the controls again.

Amy's sucking was a subtle pleasure now, though it had been agonizing the first few months, and painful again when Amy's first teeth had come in and she had learned to her delight that by nipping she could make her mother scream. But better to nurse her than ever have her eat the pro-digested pap that was served as food on the airplane. Elouise thought wryly that it was even worse than the microwaved veal cordon bleu that they used to inflict on commercial passengers. Only eight years ago. And they had calibrated their fuel so exactly that when they took the last draft of fuel from the last of their storage tanks, the tank registered empty; they would burn the last of the processed petroleum, instead of putting it back into the earth. All their caches were gone now, and they would be at the tender mercies of the world that they themselves had created.

Still, there was work to do: the final work,

the final checks. Elouise held Amy with one arm while she used her free hand slowly to key in the last program that her role as commander required her to use. Elouise Private, she typed. Teacher teacher I declare I see someone's underwear, she typed. On the screen appeared the warning she had put there: "You may think you're lucky finding this program, but unless you know the magic words, an alarm is going to go off all over this airplane and you'll be had. No way out of it, sucker. Love, Elouise."

Elouise, of course, knew the magic words. Einstein sucks, she typed. The screen went blank, and the alarm did not go off.

Malfunction? she queried. "None," answered the computer.

Tamper? she queried, and the computer answered. "None."

Nonreport? she queried, and the computer flashed, "AFscanP7bb55."

Elouise had not really been dozing. But still she was startled, and she lurched for-

*Did his hands tremble
as he touched the controls?
Elouise watched
very carefully, but he
did not tremble.
Indeed, he was the only
one who did not.
Ugly-Bugly started to cry.*

ward, disturbing Amy, who really had fallen asleep. "No no no," said Amy, and Elouise forced herself to be patient; she soothed her daughter back to sleep before pursuing whatever it was that her guardian program had caught. Whatever it was? Oh, she knew what it was. It was treachery. The one thing she had been sure her group, her airplane would never have. Other groups of Rectifiers—Wreckers, they called themselves, having adopted their enemies' name for them—other groups had had their spies or their fainthearts, but not Bill or Heather or Ugly-Bugly.

Specify, she typed.

The computer was specific.

Over northern Virginia, as the airplane followed its careful route to find and destroy everything made of metal, glass, and plastic; somewhere over northern Virginia, the airplane's path bent slightly to the south, and on the return, at the same place, the airplane's path bent slightly to the north, so that a strip of northern Virginia two kilometers long and a few dozen meters wide could contain some nonbiodegradable artifact, hidden from the airplane, and if Elouise had not queried this program,

she would never have known it.

But she should have known it. When the plane's course bent, alarms should have sounded. Someone had penetrated the first line of defense. But Bill could not have done that, nor could Heather, really—they didn't have the sophistication to break up a bubble program. Ugly-Bugly?

She knew it wasn't faithful old Ugly-Bugly. No, not her.

The computer voluntarily flashed, "Override M577b, commandmo4, intwis CtTtT." It was an apology. Someone aboard ship had found the alarm override program and the overrides for the alarm for improper use of the alarm overrides. Not my fault, the computer was saying.

Elouise hesitated for a moment. She looked down at her daughter and moved a curl of red hair away from Amy's eye. Elouise's hand trembled. But she was a woman of ice, yes, all frozen where compassion made other women warm. She prided herself on that, on having frozen the last warm places in her—frozen so god-damn rigid that it was only a moment's hesitation. And then she reached out and asked for the access code used to perform the treachery, asked for the name of the traitor.

The computer was even less compassionate than Elouise. It hesitated not at all.

The computer did not underline: the letters on the screen were no larger than normal. Yet Elouise felt the words as a shout, and she answered them silently with a scream.

Charles Evan Hardy, b24ag6l-richlandWA.

It was Charlie who was the traitor—Charlie, her sweet, soft, hard-bodied husband, Charlie who secretly was trying to undo the end of the world.

God has destroyed the world before. Once in a flood, when Noah rode it out in the Ark. And once the tower of the world's pride was destroyed in the confusion of tongues. The other times, if there were any other times, those times are all forgotten.

The world will probably be destroyed again, unless we repent. And don't think you can hide from the angels. They start out as ordinary people, and you never know which ones. Suddenly God puts the power of destruction in their hands, and they destroy. And just as suddenly, when all the destruction is done, the angel leaves them, and they're ordinary people. Just my mother and my father.

I can't remember Father Charlie's face. I was too young.

Mother Elouise told me often about Father Charlie. He was born far to the west in a land where water only comes to the crops in ditches, almost never from the sky. It was a land unblest by God. Men lived there, they believed, only by the strength of their own hands. Men made their ditches and forgot about God and became scientists. Father Charlie became a scientist. He worked on tiny animals, breaking their

heart of hearts and recombining it in new ways. Hearts were broken too often where he worked, and one of the little animals escaped and killed people until they lay in great heaps like fish in the ship's hold.

But this was not the destruction of the world.

Oh, they were giants in those days, and they forgot the Lord, but when their people lay in piles of moldering flesh and brittle bone, they remembered they were weak.

Mother Elouise said, "Charlie came weeping." This is how Father Charlie became an angel. He saw what the giants had done, by thinking they were greater than God. At first he sinned in his grief. Once he cut his own throat. They put Mother Elouise's blood in him to save his life. This is how they met: In the forest where he had gone to die privately, Father Charlie woke up from a sleep he thought would be forever to see a woman lying next to him in the tent and a doctor bending over them both. When he saw that this woman gave her blood to him whole and unstintingly, he forgot his wish to die. He loved her forever. Mother Elouise said he loved her right up to the day she killed him.

When they were finished, they had a sort of ceremony, a sort of party. "A benediction," said Bill, solemnly sipping at the gin. "Amen and amen."

"My shift," Charlie said, stepping into the cockpit. Then he noticed that everyone was there and that they were drinking the last of the gin, the bottle that had been saved for the end. "Well, happy us," Charlie said, smiling.

Bill got up from the controls of the 787. "Any preferences on where we set down?" he asked. Charlie took his place.

The others looked at one another. Ugly-Bugly shrugged. "God, who ever thought about it?"

"Come on, we're all futurists," Heather said. "You must know where you want to live."

"Two thousand years from now," Ugly-Bugly said. "I want to live in the world the way it'll be two thousand years from now."

"Ugly-Bugly opts for resurrection," Bill said. "I, however, long for the bosom of Abraham."

"Virginia," said Elouise. They turned to face her. Heather laughed.

"Resurrection," Bill intoned, "the bosom of Abraham, and Virginia. You have no poetry, Elouise."

"I've written down the coordinates of the place where we are supposed to land," Elouise said. She handed them to Charlie. He did not avoid her gaze. She watched him read the paper. He showed no sign of recognition. For a moment she hoped that it had all been a mistake, but no. She would not let herself be misled by her desires.

"Why Virginia?" Heather asked.

Charlie looked up. "It's central."

"It's east coast," Heather said.

"It's central in the high survival area. There isn't much of a living to be had in the

western mountains or on the plains. It's not so far south as to be in hunter-gatherer country and not so far north as to be unsurvivable for a high proportion of the people. Barring a hard winter."

"All very good reasons," Elouise said. "Fly us there, Charlie."

Did his hands tremble as he touched the controls? Elouise watched very carefully, but he did not tremble. Indeed, he was the only one who did not. Ugly-Bugly suddenly began to cry, tears coming from her good eye and streaming down her good cheek. *Thank God she doesn't cry out of the other side*, Elouise thought; then she was angry at herself, for she had thought Ugly-Bugly's deformed face didn't bother her anymore. Elouise was angry at herself, but it only made her cold inside, determined that there would be no failure. Her mission would be complete. No allowances made for personal cost.

Elouise suddenly started out of her contemplative mood to find that the two other

● *In the forest
where he had gone to die
privately, Father
Charlie woke up . . . to see
a woman lying
next to him in the tent
and a doctor
bending over them both.* ●

women had left the cockpit—their sleep shift, though it was doubtful they would sleep. Charlie silently flew the plane, while Bill sat in the copilot's seat, pouring himself the last drop from the bottle. He was looking at Elouise.

"Cheers," Elouise said to him.

He smiled sadly back at her. "Amen," he said. Then he leaned back and sang softly: *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.*

Praise him, ye creatures here below.

Praise him, who slew the wicked host.

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Then he reached for Elouise's hand. She was surprised, but let him take it. He bent to her and kissed her palm tenderly. "For many have entertained angels unaware," he said to her.

A few moments later he was asleep. Charlie and Elouise sat in silence. The plane flew on south as darkness overtook them from the east. At first their silence was almost affectionate. But as Elouise sat and sat, saying nothing, she felt the silence grow cold and terrible, and for the first time she realized that when the airplane landed, Charlie would be her—Charlie, who had

been half her life for these last few years, whom she had never lied to and who had never lied to her—would be her enemy.

I have watched the little children do a dance called Charlie-El. They sing a little song to it, and if I remember the words, it goes like this:

I am made of bones and glass.

Let me pass, let me pass.

I am made of brick and steel.

Take my heel, take my heel.

I was killed just yesterday.

Kneel and pray, kneel and pray.

Dig a hole where I can sleep.

Dig it deep, dig it deep.

Will I go to heaven or hell?

Charlie-El. Charlie-El.

I think they are already nonsense words to the children. But the poem first got passed word of mouth around Richmond when I was little, and living in Father Michael's house. The children do not try to answer their song. They just sing it and do a very clever little dance while they sing. They always end the song with all the children falling down on the ground, laughing. That is the best way for the song to end.

Charlie brought the airplane straight down into a field, great hot winds pushing against the ground as if to shove it back from the plane. The field caught fire, but when the plane had settled upon its three wheels, foam streaked out from the belly of the machine and overtook the flames. Elouise watched from the cockpit, thinking. *Wherever the foam has touched, nothing will grow for years.* It seemed symmetrical to her. Even in the last moments of the last machine, it must poison the earth. Elouise held Amy on her lap and thought of trying to explain it to the child. But Elouise knew Amy would not understand or remember.

"Last one dressed is a sissy-wissy," said Ugly-Bugly in her husky, ancient-sounding voice. They had dressed and undressed in front of each other for years now, but today as the old plastic-polluted clothing came off and the homespun went on, they felt and acted like school kids on their first day in coed gym. Amy caught the spirit of it and kept yelling at the top of her lungs. No one thought to quiet her. There was no need. This was a celebration.

But Elouise, long accustomed to self-examination, forced herself to realize that there was a strain to her frolicking. She did not believe it, not really. Today was not a happy day, and it was not just from knowing the confrontation that lay ahead. There was something so final about the death of the last of the engines of mankind. Surely something could be—but she forced the thought from her, forced the coldness in her to overtake that sentiment. Surely she could not be seduced by the beauty of the airplane. Surely she must remember that it was not the machines but what they inevitably did to mankind that was evil.

They looked and felt a little awkward, almost silly, as they left the plane and stood

around in the blackened field. They had not yet lost their feel for stylish clothing, and the homespun was so lumpy and awkward and rough. It didn't look right on any of them.

Amy clung to her doll, awed by the strange scenery. In her life she had been out of the airplane only once, and that was when she was an infant. She watched as the trees moved unpredictably. She winced at the wind in her eyes. She touched her cheek, where her hair moved back and forth in the breeze, and hunted through her vocabulary for a word to name the strange invisible touch on her skin. "Mommy," she said. "Uh! Uh! Uh!"

Elouise understood. "Wind," she said. The sounds were still too hard for Amy, and the child did not attempt to say the word. Wind, thought Elouise, and immediately thought of Charlie. Her best memory of Charlie was in the wind. It was during his death-wish time, not long after his suicide. He had insisted on climbing a mountain, and she knew that he meant to fall. So she had climbed with him, even though there was a storm coming up. Charlie was angry all the way. She remembered a terrible hour clinging to the face of a cliff, held only by small bits of metal forced into cracks in the rock. She had insisted on remaining tied to Charlie. "If one of us fell, it would only drag the other down, too," he kept saying. "I know," she kept answering. And so Charlie had not fallen, and they made love for the first time in a shallow cave, with the wind howling outside and occasional sprays of rain coming in to dampen them. They refused to be dampened. Wind. Damn.

And Elouise felt herself go cold and unemotional, and they stood on the edge of the field in the shade of the first trees. Elouise had left the Rectifier near the plane, set on 360 degrees. In a few minutes the Rectifier would go off, and they had to watch, to witness the end of their work.

Suddenly Bill shouted, laughed, held up his wrist. "My watch!" he cried.

"Hurry," Charlie said. "There's time."

Bill unbuckled his watch and ran toward the Rectifier. He tossed the watch. It landed within a few meters of the small machine. Then Bill returned to the group, jogging and shaking his head. "Jesus, what a moron! Three years wiping out everything east of the Mississippi, and I almost save a digital chronograph."

"Dixie Instruments?" Heather asked.

"Yeah."

"That's not high technology," she said, and they all laughed. Then they fell silent, and Elouise wondered whether they were all thinking the same thing: that jokes about brand names would be dead within a generation, if they were not already dead. They watched the Rectifier in silence, waiting for the timer to finish its delay. Suddenly there was a shining in the air, a dazzling not-light that made them squint. They had seen this many times before, from the air and from the ground, but this was the last time, and so they saw it as if it were the first.

The airplane corroded as if a thousand

years were passing in seconds. But it wasn't true corrosion. There was no rust—only dissolution as molecules separated and seeped down into the loosened earth. Glass became sand; plastic corrupted to oil; the metal also drifted down into the ground and came to rest in a vein at the bottom of the Rectifier field. Whatever else the metal might look like to a future geologist, it wouldn't look like an artifact. It would look like iron. And with so many similar pockets of iron and copper and aluminum and tin spread all over the once-civilized world, it was not likely that they would suspect human interference. Elouise was amused, thinking of the treatises that would someday be written, about the two states of workable metals—the ore state and the pure-metal vein. She hoped it would retard their progress a little.

The airplane shivered into nothing, and the Rectifier also died in the field. A few minutes after the Rectifier disappeared, the field also faded.

*• Suddenly there
was a shining in the air,
a dazzling not-light
that made them squint. They
had seen this many
times before, from the air
and from the ground,
but this was the last time. •*

"Amen and amen," said Bill, maudlin again. "All clean now."

Elouise only smiled. She said nothing of the other Rectifier, which was in her knapsack. Let the others think all the work was done.

Amy poked her finger in Charlie's eye. Charlie swore and set her down. Amy started to cry, and Charlie knelt by her and hugged her. Amy's arms went tightly around his neck. "Give Daddy a kiss," Elouise said.

"Well, time to go," Ugly-Bugly's voice rasped. "Why the hell did you pick this particular spot?"

Elouise cocked her head. "Ask Charlie." Charlie flushed. Elouise watched him grimly. "Elouise and I once came here," he said. "Before Rectification began. Nostalgia, you know." He smiled shyly, and the others laughed. Except Elouise. She was helping Amy to urinate. She felt the weight of the small Rectifier in her knapsack and did not tell anyone the truth: that she had never been in Virginia before in her life.

"Good a spot as any," Heather said. "Well, bye."

Well, bye. That was all, that was the end

of it, and Heather walked away to the west, toward the Shenandoah Valley.

"See ya," Bill said.

"Like hell," Ugly-Bugly added.

Impulsively Ugly-Bugly hugged Elouise, and Bill cried, and then they took off north-east, toward the Potomac, where they would doubtlessly find a community growing up along the clean and fish-filled river.

Just Charlie, Amy, and Elouise left in the empty, blackened field where the airplane had died. Elouise tried to feel some great pain at the separation from the others, but she could not. They had been together every day for years now, going from supply dump to supply dump, wrecking cities and towns, destroying and using up the artificial world. But had they been friends? If it had not been for their task, they would never have been friends. They were not the same kind of people.

And then Elouise was ashamed of her feelings. Not her kind of people? Because Heather liked what grass did to her and had never owned a car or had a driver's license in her life? Because Ugly-Bugly had a face hideously deformed by cancer surgery? Because Bill always worked Jesus into the conversation, even though half the time he was an atheist? Because they just weren't in the same social circles? There were no social circles now. Just people trying to survive in a bitter world they weren't bred for. There were only two classes now: those who would make it and those who wouldn't.

Which class am I? thought Elouise.

"Where should we go?" Charlie asked.

Elouise picked Amy up and handed her to Charlie. "Where's the capsule, Charlie?"

Charlie took Amy and said, "Hey, Amy, baby, I'll bet we find some farming community between here and the Rappahannock."

"Doesn't matter if you tell me, Charlie. The instruments found it before we landed. You did a damn good job on the computer program." She didn't have to say, Not good enough.

Charlie only smiled crookedly. "Here I was hoping you were forgetful." He reached out to touch her knapsack. She pulled abruptly away. He lost his smile. "Don't you know me?" he asked softly.

He would never try to take the Rectifier from her by force. But still. This was the last of the artifacts they were talking about. Was anyone really predictable at such a time? Elouise was not sure. She had thought she knew him well before, yet the time capsule existed to prove that her understanding of Charlie was far from complete.

"I know you, Charlie," she said, "but not as well as I thought. Does it matter? Don't try to stop me."

"I hope you're not too angry," he said.

Elouise couldn't think of anything to say to that. *Anyone could be fooled by a traitor, but only I am fool enough to marry one.* She turned from him and walked into the forest. He took Amy and followed.

All the way through the underbrush

Elouise kept expecting him to say something. A threat, for instance: You'll have to kill me to destroy that time capsule. Or a plea: You have to leave it, Elouise, please, please. Or reason, or argument, or anger, or something.

But instead it was just his silent footfalls behind her. Just his occasional playtalk with Amy. Just his singing as he put Amy to sleep on his shoulder.

The capsule had been hidden well. There was no surface sign that men had ever been here. Yet, from the Rectifier's emphatic response, it was obvious that the time capsule was quite large. There must have been heavy, earth-moving equipment. Or was it all done by hand?

"When did you ever find the time?" Elouise asked when they reached the spot.

"Long lunch hours," he said.

She set down her knapsack and then stood there, looking at him.

Like a condemned man who insists on keeping his composure, Charlie smiled wryly and said, "Get on with it, please."

After Father Charlie died, Mother Elouise brought me here to Richmond. She didn't tell anyone that she was a Wrecker. The angel had already left her, and she wanted to blend into the town, be an ordinary person in the world she and her fellow angels had created.

Yet she was incapable of blending in. Once the angel touches you, you cannot go back, even when the angel's work is done. She first attracted attention by talking against the stockade. There was once a stockade around the town of Richmond, when there were only a thousand people here. The reason was simple: People still weren't used to the hard way life was without the old machines. They had not yet learned to depend on the miracle of Christ. They still trusted in their hands, yet their hands could work no more magic. So there were tribes in the winter that didn't know how to find game, that had no reserves of grain, that had no shelter adequate to hold the head of a fire.

"Bring them all in," said Mother Elouise. "There's room for all. There's food for all. Teach them how to build ships and make tools and sail and farm, and we'll all be richer for it."

But Father Michael and Uncle Avram knew more than Mother Elouise. Father Michael had been a Catholic priest before the destruction, and Uncle Avram had been a professor at a university. They had been nobody. But when the angels of destruction finished their work, the angels of life began to work in the hearts of men. Father Michael threw off his old allegiance to Rome and taught Christ simple, from his memory of the Holy Book. Uncle Avram plunged into his memory of ancient metallurgy and taught the people who gathered at Richmond how to make iron hard enough to use for tools. And weapons.

Father Michael forbade the making of guns and forbade that anyone teach chil-

dren what guns were. But for hunting there had to be arrows, and what will kill a deer will also kill a man.

Many people agreed with Mother Elouise about the stockade. But then in the worst of winter a tribe came from the mountains and threw fire against the stockade and against the ships that kept trade alive along the whole coast. The archers of Richmond killed most of them, and people said to Mother Elouise, "Now you must agree we need the stockade."

Mother Elouise said, "Would they have come with fire if there had been no wall?"

How can anyone judge the greatest need? Just as the angel of death had come to plant the seeds of a better life, so that angel of life had to be hard and endure death so the many could live. Father Michael and Uncle Avram held to the laws of Christ simple, for did not the Holy Book say, "Love your enemies, and smite them only when they attack you; chase them not out into the forest, but let them live as long

● *Father Michael
forbade the making of guns
and forbade that
anyone teach children what
guns were. But for
hunting there had to be
arrows, and what kills
a deer will also kill a man.* ●

as they leave you alone?"

I remember that winter. I remember watching while they buried the dead tribesmen. Their bodies had stiffened quickly, but Mother Elouise brought me to see them and said, "This is death, remember it, remember it." What did Mother Elouise know? Death is our passage from flesh into the living wind, until Christ brings us forth into living again. Mother Elouise will find Father Charlie again, and every wound will be made whole.

Elouise knelt by the Rectifier and carefully set it to go off in half an hour, destroying itself and the time capsule buried thirty meters under the ground. Charlie stood near her, watching, his face nearly expressionless; only a faint smile broke his perfect repose. Amy was in his arms, laughing and trying to reach up to pinch his nose.

"This Rectifier responds only to me," Elouise said quietly. "Alive. If you try to move it, it will go off early and kill us all."

"I won't move it," Charlie said.

And Elouise was finished. She stood up and reached for Amy. Amy reached back, holding out her arms to her mother. "Mommy," she said.

Because I couldn't remember Father Charlie's face, Mother Elouise thought I had forgotten everything about him, but that is not true. I remember very clearly one picture of him, but he is not in the picture.

This is very hard for me to explain. I see a small clearing in the trees, with Mother Elouise standing in front of me. I see her at my eye level, which tells me that I am being held. I cannot see Father Charlie, but I know that he is holding me. I can feel his arms around me, but I cannot see his face.

This vision has come to me often. It is not like other dreams. It is very clear, and I am always very afraid, and I don't know why. They are talking, but I do not understand their words. Mother Elouise reaches for me, but Father Charlie will not let me go. I feel afraid that Father Charlie will not let me go with Mother Elouise. But why should I be afraid? I love Father Charlie, and I never want to leave him. Still I reach out, reach out, reach out, and still the arms hold me and I cannot go.

Mother Elouise is crying. I see her face twisted in pain. I want to comfort her. "Mommy is hurt," I say again and again.

And then, suddenly, at the end of this vision I am in my mother's arms and we are running, running up a hill, into the trees. I am looking back over her shoulder. I see Father Charlie then. I see him, but I do not see him. I know exactly where he is, in my vision. I could tell you his height. I could tell you where his left foot is and where his right foot is, but still I can't see him. He has no face, no color: he is just a man-shaped emptiness in the clearing, and then the trees are in the way and he is gone.

Elouise stopped only a little way into the woods. She turned around, as if to go back to Charlie. But she would not go back. If she returned to him, it would be to disconnect the Rectifier. There would be no other reason to do it.

"Charlie, you son of a bitch!" she shouted.

There was no answer. She stood, waiting. Surely he would come to her. He would see that she would never go back, never turn off the machine. Once he realized it was inevitable, he would come running from the machine, into the forest, back to the clearing where the 787 had landed. Why would he want to give his life so meaninglessly? What was in the time capsule, after all? Just history—that's what he said, wasn't it? Just history, just films and metal plates engraved with words and microdots and other ways of preserving the story of mankind. "How can they learn from our mistakes, unless we tell them what they were?" Charlie had asked.

Sweet, simple, naive Charlie. It is one thing to preserve a hatred for the killing machines and the soul-destroying machines and the garbage-making machines. It was another thing to leave behind detailed, accurate, unquestionable descriptions. History was not a way of preventing the repetition of mistakes. It was a way

of guaranteeing them. Wasn't it?

She turned and walked on, not very quickly, out of the range of the Rectifier, carrying Amy and listening, all the way, for the sound of Charlie running after her.

What was Mother Elouise like? She was a woman of contradictions. Even with me, she would work for hours teaching me to read, helping me make tablets out of river clay and write on them with a shaped stick. And then, when I had written the words she taught me, she would weep and say, "Lies, all lies." Sometimes she would break the tablets I had made. But whenever part of her words was broken, she would make me write it again.

She called the collection of words *The Book of the Golden Age*. I have named it *The Book of the Lies of the Angel Elouise*, for it is important for us to know that the greatest truths we have seem like lies to those who have been touched by the angel.

She told many stories to me, and often I asked her why they must be written down. "For Father Charlie," she would always say.

"Is he coming back, then?" I would ask. But she shook her head, and finally one time she said, "It is not for Father Charlie to read. It is because Father Charlie wanted it written."

"Then why didn't he write it himself?" I asked.

And Mother Elouise grew very cold with me, and all she would say was, "Father Charlie bought these stories. He paid more for them than I am willing to pay to have them left unwritten." I wondered then whether Father Charlie was rich, but other things she said told me that he wasn't. So I do not understand except that Mother Elouise did not want to tell the stories, and Father Charlie, though he was not there, constrained her to tell them.

There are many of Mother Elouise's lies that I love, but I will say now which of them she said were most important:

1. In the Golden Age for ten times a thousand years men lived in peace and love and joy, and no one did evil one to another. They shared all things in common, and no man was hungry while another was full, and no man had a home while another stood in the rain, and no wife wept for her husband, killed before his time.

2. The great serpent seems to come with great power. He has many names: Satan, Hitler, Lucifer, Nimrod, Napoleon. He seems to be beautiful, and he promises power to his friends and death to his enemies. He says he will right all wrongs. But really he is weak, until people believe in him and give him the power of their bodies. If you refuse to believe in the serpent, if no one serves him, he will go away.

3. There are many cycles of the world. In every cycle the great serpent has arisen and the world has been destroyed to make way for the return of the Golden Age. Christ comes again in every cycle, also. One day when He comes men will believe in Christ

and doubt the great serpent, and that time the Golden Age will never end, and God will dwell among men forever. And all the angels will say, "Come not to heaven but to Earth, for Earth is heaven now."

These are the most important lies of Mother Elouise. Believe them all, and remember them, for they are true.

All the way to the airplane clearing, Elouise deliberately broke branches and let them dangle so that Charlie would have no trouble finding a straight path out of the range of the Rectifier, even if he left his flight to the last second. She was sure Charlie would follow her. Charlie would bend to her as he had always bent, resilient and accommodating. He loved Elouise, and Amy he loved even more. What was in the metal under his feet that would weigh in the balance against his love for them?

So Elouise broke the last branch and stepped into the clearing and then sat down and let Amy play in the unburnt grass

*He had missed
her neck and struck deep
in her back and
shoulder. She screamed.
He struck again
and . . . silenced her. Then
he turned away,
spattered with blood . . .*

at the edge while she waited. *It is Charlie who will bend, she said to herself, for I will never bend on this. Later I will make it up to him, but he must know that on this I will never bend.*

The cold place in her grew larger and colder until she burned inside, waiting for the sound of feet crashing through the underbrush. The damnable birds kept singing, so that she could not hear the footsteps.

Mother Elouise never hit me, or anyone else so far as I knew. She fought only with her words and silent acts, though she could have killed easily with her hands. I saw her physical power only once. We were in the forest, to gather firewood. We stumbled upon a wild hog. Apparently it felt cornered, though we were weaponless; perhaps it was just mean. I have not studied the ways of wild hogs. It charged, not Mother Elouise, but me. I was five at the time, and terrified. I ran to Mother Elouise, tried to cling to her, but she threw me out of the way and went into a crouch. I was screaming. She paid no attention to me. The hog continued rushing, but seeing I was down and Mother Elouise was erect, it

changed its path. When it came near, she leaped to the side. It was not nimble enough to turn to face her. As it lumbered past, Mother Elouise kicked it just behind the head. The kick broke the hog's neck so violently that its head dropped and the hog rolled over and over, and when it was through rolling, it was already dead.

Mother Elouise did not have to die.

She died in the winter when I was seven. I should tell you how life was then, in Richmond. We were only two thousand souls by then, not the large city of ten thousand we are now. We had only six finished ships trading the coast, and they had not yet gone so far north as Manhattan, though we had run one voyage all the way to Savannah in the south. Richmond already ruled and protected from the Potomac to Dismal Swamp. But it was a very hard winter, and the town's leaders insisted on hoarding all the stored grain and fruits and vegetables and meat for our protected towns, and let the distant tribes trade or travel where they would, they would get no food from Richmond.

It was then that my mother, who claimed she did not believe in God, and Uncle Avram, who was a Jew, and Father Michael, who was a priest, all argued the same side of the question. It's better to feed them than to kill them, they all said. But when the tribes from west of the mountains and north of the Potomac came into Richmond lands, pleading for help, the leaders of Richmond turned them away and closed the gates of the towns. An army marched then, to put the fear of God, as they said, into the hearts of the tribesmen. They did not know which side God was on.

Father Michael argued and Uncle Avram stormed and fumed, but Mother Elouise silently went to the gate at moonrise one night and alone overpowered the guards. Silently she gagged them and bound them and opened the gates to the hungry tribesmen. They came through weaponless, as she had insisted. They quietly went to the storehouses and carried off as much food as they could. They were found only as the last few fled. No one was killed.

But there was an uproar, a cry of treason, a trial, and an execution. They decided on beheading, because they thought it would be quick and merciful. They had never seen a beheading.

It was Jack Woods who used the ax. He practiced all afternoon with pumpkins. Pumpkins have no bones.

In the evening they all gathered to watch, some because they hated Mother Elouise, some because they loved her, and the rest because they could not stay away. I went also, and Father Michael held my head and would not let me see. But I heard.

Father Michael prayed for Mother Elouise. Mother Elouise damned his and everyone else's soul to hell. She said, "If you kill me for bringing life, you will only bring death on your own heads."

"That's true," said the men around her.

"We will all die. But you will die first."

"Then I'm the luckier," said Mother Elouise. It was the last of her lies, for she was telling the truth, and yet she did not believe it herself, for I heard her weep. With her last breaths she wept and cried out, "Charlie! Charlie!" There are those who claim she saw a vision of Charlie waiting for her on the right hand of God, but I doubt it. She would have said so. I think she only wished to see him; Or wished for his forgiveness. It doesn't matter. The angel had long since left her, and she was alone.

Jack swung the ax and it fell, more with a smack than a thud. He had missed her neck and struck deep in her back and shoulder. She screamed. He struck again and this time silenced her. But he did not break through her spine until the third blow. Then he turned away, spattered with blood, and vomited and wept and pleaded with Father Michael to forgive him.

Amy stood a few meters away from Elouise, who sat on the grass of the clearing, looking toward a broken branch on the nearest tree. Amy called, "Mommy! Mommy!" Then she bounced up and down, bending and unbending her knees. "Da! Da!" she cried. "La la la la la." She was dancing and wanted her mother to dance and sing, too. But Elouise only looked toward the tree, waiting for Charlie to appear. *Any minute, she thought. He will be angry. He will be ashamed, she thought. But he will be alive.*

In the distance, however, the air all at once was shining. Elouise could see it clearly because they were not far from the edge of the Rectifier field. It shimmered in the trees, where it caused no harm to plants. Any vertebrates within the field, any animals that lived by electricity passing along nerves, were instantly dead, their brains stilled. Birds dropped from tree limbs. Only insects droned on.

The Rectifier field lasted only minutes.

Amy watched the shining air. It was as if the empty sky itself were dancing with her. She was transfixed. She would soon forget the airplane, and already her father's face was disappearing from her memories. But she would remember the shining. She would see it forever in her dreams, a vast thickening of the air, dancing and vibrating up and down, up and down. In her dreams it would always be the same, a terrible shining light that would grow and grow and grow and press against her in her bed. And always with it would come the sound of a voice she loved, saying, "Jesus. Jesus. Jesus." This dream would come so clearly when she was twelve that she would tell it to her adopted father, the priest named Michael. He told her that it was the voice of an angel, speaking the name of the source of all light. "You must not fear the light," he said. "You must embrace it." It satisfied her.

But at the moment she first heard the voice, in fact and not in dream, she had no trouble recognizing it. It was the voice of

her mother, Elouise, saying, "Jesus." It was full of grief that only a child could fail to understand. Amy did not understand. She only tried to repeat the word, "Deeah-zah."

"God," said Elouise, rocking back and forth, her face turned up toward a heaven she was sure was unoccupied.

"Dog," Amy repeated, "Dog dog doggie." In vain she looked around for the four-footed beast.

"Charlie!" Elouise screamed as the Rectifier field faded.

"Daddy," Amy cried, and because of her mother's tears she also wept. Elouise took her daughter in her arms and held her, rocking back and forth. Elouise discovered that there were some things that could not be frozen in her. Some things that must burn: Sunlight. And lightning. And everlasting, inextinguishable regret.

My mother, Mother Elouise, often told me about my father. She described Father Charlie in detail, so I would not forget. She refused to let me forget anything. "It's what Father Charlie died for," she told me, over and over. "He died so you would remember. You cannot forget."

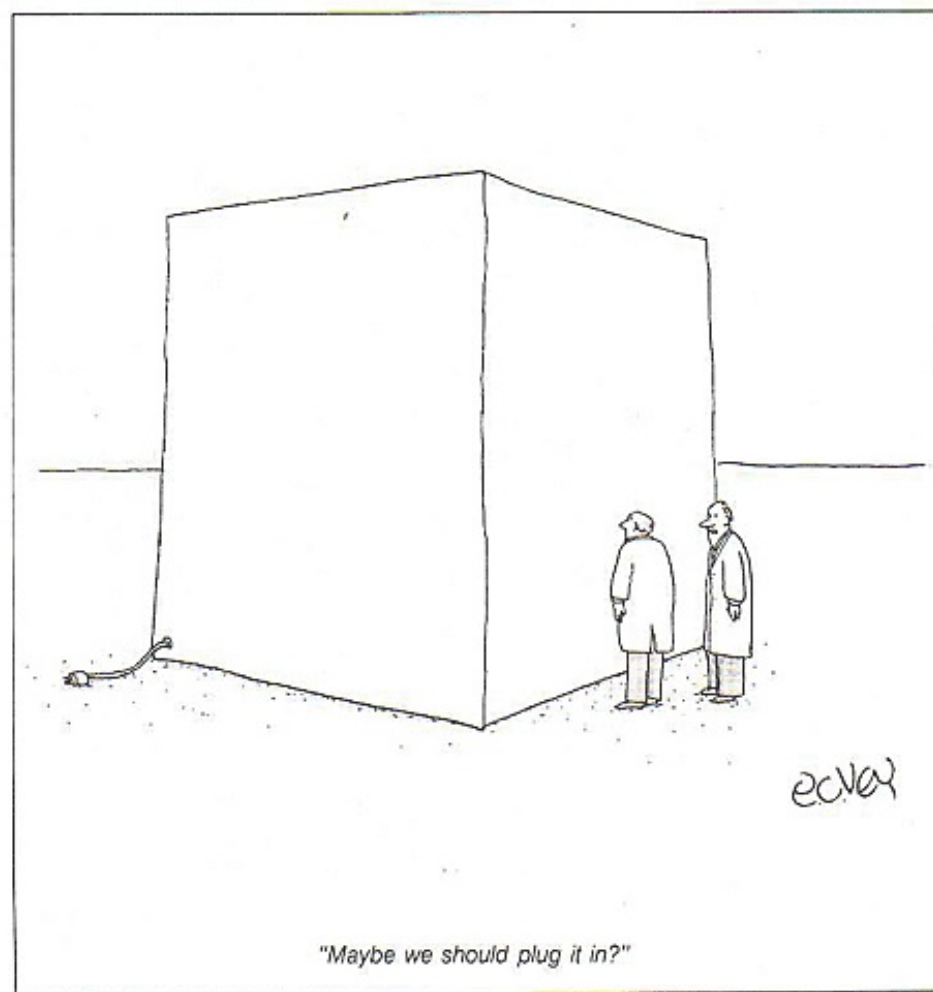
So I still remember, even today, every word she told me about him. His hair was red, as mine was. His body was lean and hard. His smile was quick, like mine, and he had gentle hands. When his hair was long or sweaty, it kinked tightly at his forehead, ears, and neck. His touch was so delicate

he could cut in half an animal so tiny it could not be seen without a machine; so sensitive that he could fly—an art that Mother Elouise said was not a miracle, since it could be done by many giants of the Golden Age, and they took with them many others who could not fly alone. This was Charlie's gift, Mother Elouise said. She also told me that I loved him dearly.

But for all the words that she taught me, I still have no picture of my father in my mind. It is as if the words drove out the vision, as so often happens.

Yet I still hold that one memory of my father, so deeply hidden that I can neither lose it nor fully find it again. Sometimes I wake up weeping. Sometimes I wake up with my arms in the air, curved just so, and I remember that I was dreaming of embracing that large man who loved me. My arms remember how it feels to hold Father Charlie tight around the neck and cling to him as he carries his child. And when I cannot sleep, and the pillow seems to be always the wrong shape, it is because I am hunting for the shape of Father Charlie's shoulder, which my heart remembers, though my mind cannot.

God put angels into Mother Elouise and Father Charlie, and they destroyed the world, for the cup of God's indignation was full, and all the works of man were an abomination. All the works of men become dust, but out of dust God makes men, and out of men and women, angels.



DEEP-BREATHING EXERCISES

*He learned a basic truth: that life begins with a breath, and he
could predict the end of your life—with a breath*

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

If Dale Yorgason hadn't been so easily distracted, he might never have noticed the breathing. But he was on his way upstairs to change clothes, noticed the headline on the paper, and got deflected. Instead of climbing the stairs, he sat on them and began to read. He could not even concentrate on that, however. He began to hear all the sounds of the house. Brian, their two-year-old son, was upstairs, breathing heavily in sleep. Colly, his wife, was in the kitchen, kneading bread and also breathing heavily.

Their breath was exactly in unison. Brian's rasping breath upstairs, thick with the mucus of a child's sleep; Colly's deep breaths as she labored with the dough. It set Dale to thinking, the newspaper forgotten. He wondered how often people did that—breathing simultaneously for minutes on end. He began to wonder about coincidence.

And then, because he was so easily distracted, he remembered that he had to change his clothes and went upstairs.

When he came down, in his jeans and sweat shirt, ready for a good game of outdoor basketball now that it was spring, Colly called to him. "I'm out of cinnamon, Dale."

"I'll get it on the way home."

"I need it now!" Colly called.

"We have two cars!" Dale yelled back, then closed the door. He briefly felt bad about not helping her out but reminded himself that he was already running late and it wouldn't hurt her to take Brian with her and get outside the house. She never seemed to get out of the house anymore.

His team of friends from Allways Home Products, Inc., won the game, and he came home deliciously sweaty. No one was home. The bread dough had risen impossibly and was spread all over the counter and dropping in large lumps onto the floor. Colly had obviously been gone too long. He wondered what could have delayed her.

Then came the phone call from the police, and he did not have to wonder

PAINTING BY RENE MAGRITTE



any more. Colly had a habit of inadvertently running stop signs.

The funeral was well attended because Dale had a large family and was well liked at the office. He sat between his parents and Colly's parents. The speakers droned on, and Dale, easily distracted, kept thinking of the fact that of all the mourners there, only a few were truly grieving. Only a few had actually known Colly, who preferred to avoid office functions and social gatherings, who stayed home with Brian most of the time, being a perfect housewife and reading books, remaining, in the end, solitary. Most of the people at the funeral had come for Dale's sake, to comfort him. *Am I comforted?* he asked himself. Not by his friends—they had little to say, were awkward and embarrassed. Only his father had had the right instinct, just embracing him and then talking about everything except Dale's wife and son, who were dead, so mangled in the accident that the coffin was never opened for anyone. There was talk of the fishing in Lake Superior this summer; talk of the bastards at Continental Hardware who thought that the retirement-at-sixty-five rule ought to apply to the president of the company; talk of nothing at all. But it was good enough, since it served the intended function. At least temporarily Dale's thoughts began to wander, and he was distracted from his numbing grief.

Now, however, he wondered whether he had really been a good husband for Colly. Had she really been happy, cooped up in the house all day? He had tried to get her out, get her to meet people, and she had resisted. But in the end, as he wondered whether he knew her at all, he could not find an answer, not one he was sure of. And Brian—he had not known Brian at all. The boy was smart and quick, speaking in sentences when other children were still struggling with single words; but what had he and Dale ever had to talk about? All Brian's companionship had been with his mother; all Colly's companionship had been with Brian. In a way it was like their breathing—the last time Dale had heard them breathe—in unison, as if even the rhythms of their bodies were together. It pleased Dale somehow to think that they had drawn their last breath together, too, the unison continuing to the grave; now they would be lowered into the earth in perfect unison, sharing a coffin as they had shared every day since Brian's birth.

Dale's grief swept over him again, surprising him because he had thought he had cried as much as he possibly could, and now he discovered there were more tears waiting to flow. He was not sure whether he was crying because of the empty house he would come home to or because he had always been somewhat closed off from his family. Was the coffin, after all, just an expression of the way their relationship had always been? It was not a productive line of thought, and so Dale once again let himself be distracted. He let

himself notice that his parents were breathing together.

Their breaths were soft, hard to hear. But Dale heard and looked at them, watched their chests rise and fall together. It unnerved him. Was unison breathing more common than he had thought? He listened for others, but Colly's parents were not breathing together, and certainly Dale's breaths were at his own rhythm. Then Dale's mother looked at him, smiled, and nodded to him in an attempt at silent communication. Dale was not good at silent communication; meaningful pauses and knowing looks always left him baffled. They always made him want to check his fly. Another distraction, and he did not think of breathing again.

Until at the airport, when the plane was an hour late in arriving because of technical difficulties in Los Angeles. There was not much to talk to his parents about. Even his father, a wizard at small talk, could think of nothing to say, and so they sat in silence

*• Their breaths
were soft, hard to hear.
But Dale heard
and looked at them, watched
their chests rise
and fall together. It
unnerved him. . . .
He listened for others. . . . •*

most of the time, as did most of the other passengers. Even a stewardess and the pilot sat near them, waiting silently for the plane to arrive.

It was in one of the deeper silences that Dale noticed that his father and the pilot were both swinging their crossed legs in unison. Then he listened and realized there was a strong sound in the waiting area, a rhythmic sighing of many of the passengers inhaling and exhaling together. Dale's mother and father, the pilot, the stewardess, several other passengers, all were breathing together. It unnerved him. How could this be? Colly and Brian had been mother and son; Dale's parents had been together for years. But why should half the people in the waiting area breathe together?

He pointed it out to his father.

"Yes, it is kind of strange, but I think you're right," his father said, rather delighted with the odd event. Dale's father loved odd events.

Then the rhythm abruptly broke as the plane taxied along the runway and slowed to a halt directly in front of the windows of the airport lobby. The crowd stirred and got

ready to board, even though the actual boarding time was surely half an hour off.

The plane broke apart in midair somewhere over eastern Kentucky, and they didn't find the wreckage for days. About half the people in the airplane had survived, and most of them were rescued before exposure could do more than make them ill. However, the entire crew and several passengers, including Dale's parents, were killed when the crippled plane plunged to the ground.

It was then that Dale realized that the breathing was not a result of coincidence or of people's closeness during their lives. It was a messenger of death; they breathed together because they were going to draw their last breath together. He said nothing about this thought to anyone else, but whenever he got distracted from things, he tended to speculate on this. It was better than dwelling on the fact that he, a man to whom family had been very important, was now completely without family; that the only people with whom he was completely himself, completely at ease, were gone, and there was no more ease for him in the world. Much better to wonder whether his knowledge might be used to save lives. After all, he often thought, reasoning in a circular pattern that never seemed to end, if I notice this again, I should be able to alert someone, to warn someone, to save their lives. Yet if I were going to save their lives, would they then breathe in unison? If my parents had been warned and changed flights, he thought, they wouldn't have died and therefore wouldn't have breathed together. So I wouldn't have been able to warn them, and so they wouldn't have changed flights, and so they would have died, and so they would have breathed in unison, and so I would have noticed and warned them . . .

More than anything that had ever passed through his mind before, this thought engaged him, and he was not easily distracted from it. It began to hurt his work; he slowed down, made mistakes, because he concentrated only on breathing, listening constantly to the secretaries and other executives in his company, waiting for the fatal moment when they would breathe in unison.

He was eating alone at a restaurant when he heard it again. The sighs of breath came all together, from every table near him. It took him a few moments to be sure; then he leaped from the table and walked briskly outside. He did not stop to pay, for the breathing was still in unison at every table right to the door of the restaurant.

The maître d', predictably, was annoyed at his leaving without paying and called out to him. Dale did not answer. "Wait! You didn't pay!" cried the man, following Dale out into the street.

Dale did not know how far he had to go for safety from whatever danger faced everyone in the restaurant; he ended up having no choice in the matter. The maître d' stopped him on the sidewalk, only a few doors down from the restaurant, and tried to

pull him back toward the place, Dale resisting all the way.

"You can't leave without paying. What do you think you're doing?"

"I can't go back," Dale shouted. "I'll pay you. I'll pay you right here." And he fumbled in his wallet for the money as a huge explosion knocked him and the maître d' to the ground. Flames erupted from the restaurant, and people screamed as the building began crumbling from the force of the explosion. It was impossible that anyone inside the building could still be alive.

The maître d', his eyes wide with horror, stood up as Dale did and looked at him with dawning understanding. "You knew!" he said. "You knew!"

Dale was acquitted at the trial—phone calls from a radical group and the purchase of large quantities of explosives in several states led to the indictment and conviction of someone else. But at the trial enough was said to convince Dale and several psychiatrists that something was seriously wrong with him. He was voluntarily committed to an institution, where Dr. Howard Rumming spent hours in conversation with Dale, trying to understand his madness, his fixation on breathing as a sign of coming death.

"I'm sane in every other way, aren't I, Doctor?" Dale asked, again and again. And repeatedly the doctor answered, "What is sanity? Who has it? How can I know?"

Often Dale was tempted to ask him what the hell he was doing trying to help the mentally deranged when he did not know what sanity was, what condition he was trying to bring the insane to achieve. But he never did.

Instead he found that the mental hospital was not an unpleasant place to be. It was a private institution, and a lot of money had gone into it; most of the people there were voluntary commitments, which meant that conditions had to remain excellent. It was one of the things that made Dale grateful for his father's wealth. In the hospital he was safe; the only contact with the outside world was the television. Gradually he met people and became attached to them in the hospital, began to relax, to lose his obsession with breathing, to stop listening quite so intently for the sound of inhalation and exhalation, the way that different people's breathing rhythms fit together. Gradually he began to be his old, distractible self.

"I'm nearly cured, Doctor," Dale announced one day in the middle of a game of backgammon.

The doctor sighed. "I know it, Dale. I have to admit it—I'm disappointed. Not in your cure, you understand. It's just that you've been a breath of fresh air, you should pardon the expression." They both laughed a little. "I get so tired of middle-aged women with fashionable nervous breakdowns, or mid-life crises."

Dale was gammoned—the dice were all against him. But he took it well, knowing

that next time he was quite likely to win handily—he usually did. Then he and Dr. Rumming got up from their table and walked toward the front of the recreation room, where the television program had been interrupted by a special news bulletin. The people around the television looked disturbed; news was never allowed on the hospital television, and only a bulletin like this could creep in. Dr. Rumming walked over to the set, intending to turn it off, but the words coming over the air were so alarming that he could not tear himself away.

"... from satellites fully capable of destroying every major city in the United States. The President was furnished with a list of fifty-four cities targeted by the orbiting missiles. One of these, said the communiqué, will be destroyed immediately to show that the threat is serious and will be carried out. Civil Defense authorities have been notified, and citizens of the fifty-four cities will be on standby for immediate

● Often Dale was
tempted to ask him what
the hell he was
doing trying to help the
mentally deranged
when he did not know what
sanity was, what
he was trying to achieve. ●

evacuation." There followed the normal parade of special reports and deep background, but it was patently clear that the reporters were all afraid.

Dale's mind could not stay on the program, however, because he was distracted by something far more compelling. Every person in the room was breathing in perfect unison, including Dale. He tried to break out of the rhythm and couldn't.

It's just my fear, Dale thought. Just the broadcast, making me think that I hear the breathing.

A Denver newsman came on the air then, overriding the network broadcast. "Denver, ladies and gentlemen, is one of the targeted cities. The city has asked us to inform you that orderly evacuation is to begin immediately. Obey all traffic laws and drive east from the city if you live in the following neighborhoods..."

Then the newsman stopped and, breathing heavily, listened to something coming through his earphone.

The newsman was breathing in perfect unison with all the people in the room.

"Dale," Dr. Rumming said.

Dale only breathed, feeling death poised

above him in the sky.

"Dale, can you hear the breathing?"

Dale heard the breathing.

The newsman spoke again. "Denver is definitely the target. The missiles have already been launched. Please leave immediately. Do not stop for any reason. It is estimated that we have less than—less than three minutes. My God," he said, and got up from his chair, breathing heavily, running out of the range of the camera. No one turned any equipment off in the station—the tube kept on showing the local news set, the empty chairs, the tables, the weather map.

"We can't get out in time," Dr. Rumming said to the inmates in the room. "We're near the center of Denver. Our only hope is to lie on the floor. Try to get under tables and chairs as much as possible." The inmates, terrified, complied with the voice of authority.

"So much for my cure," Dale said, his voice trembling. Rumming managed a half-smile. They lay together in the middle of the floor, leaving the furniture for everyone else because they knew that the furniture would do no good at all.

"You definitely don't belong here," Rumming told him. "I never met a saner man in all my life."

Dale was distracted, however. Instead of his impending death he thought of Colly and Brian in their coffin. He imagined the earth being swept away in a huge wind, and the coffin being ashed immediately in the white explosion from the sky. *The barrier is coming down at last, Dale thought, and I will be with them as completely as it is possible to be.* He thought of Brian learning to walk, crying when he fell; he remembered Colly saying, "Don't pick him up every time he cries, or he'll just learn that crying gets results." And so for three days Dale had listened to Brian cry and cry and never lifted a hand to help the boy. Brian learned to walk quite well, and quickly. But now, suddenly, Dale felt again that irresistible impulse to pick Brian up, to put his son's pathetically red and weeping face on his shoulder, to say, "That's all right, Daddy's holding you."

"That's all right, Daddy's holding you," Dale said aloud, softly. Then there was a flash of white so bright that it could be seen as easily through the walls as through the window, for there were no walls, and all the breath was drawn out of their bodies at once, their voices robbed from them so suddenly that they all involuntarily shouted and then, forever, were silent. Their shout was taken up in a violent wind that swept the sound, wrung from every throat in perfect unison, upward into the clouds forming over what had once been Denver.

And in the last moment, as the shout was drawn from his lungs and the heat took his eyes out of his face, Dale realized that despite all his foreknowledge, the only life he had ever saved was that of a maître d'hôtel, whose life, to Dale, didn't mean a thing.

*Primitive heroes
from the past are coming
into your future*

NOBLE SAVAGE

BY L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

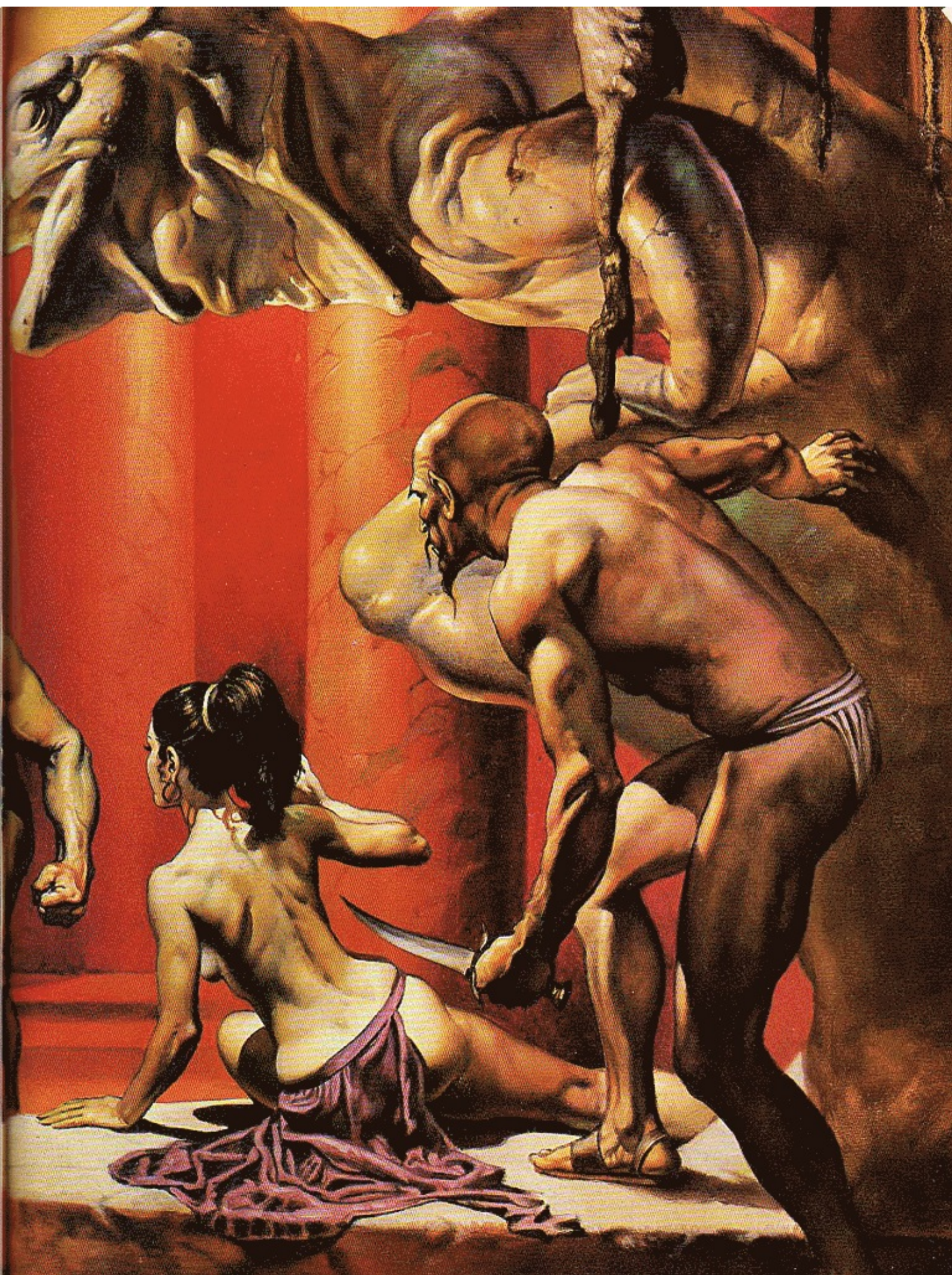
Broadsword in one hand, guttering torch in the other, his keen barbarian senses alert, Darthan slunk through the tunnels beneath the lost city of Caas on his way to the fabled treasure.

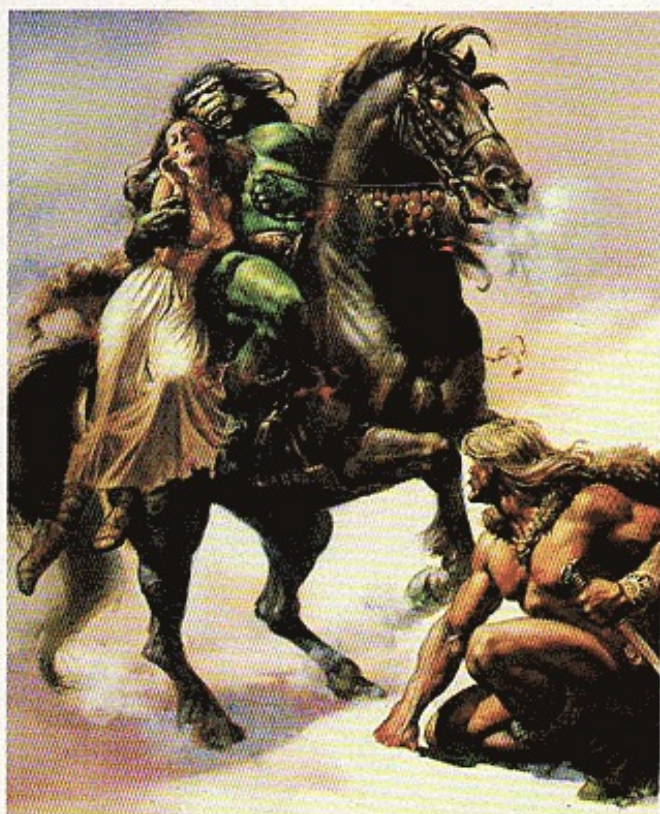
Heroic fantasy is alive and flourishing. The more complex, cerebral, and restrained the civilization, the more men's minds return to a dream of earlier times, when issues of good and evil were clear-cut and a man could venture out with his sword, conquer his enemies, and win a kingdom and a beautiful woman. The idea is compelling, even though such an age probably never existed. Tarzan, Conan, Tanar of Pellucidar, John Carter of Mars, and all the other brawny heroes of heroic fiction derive



PAINTINGS BY BORIS VALLEJO

BORIS

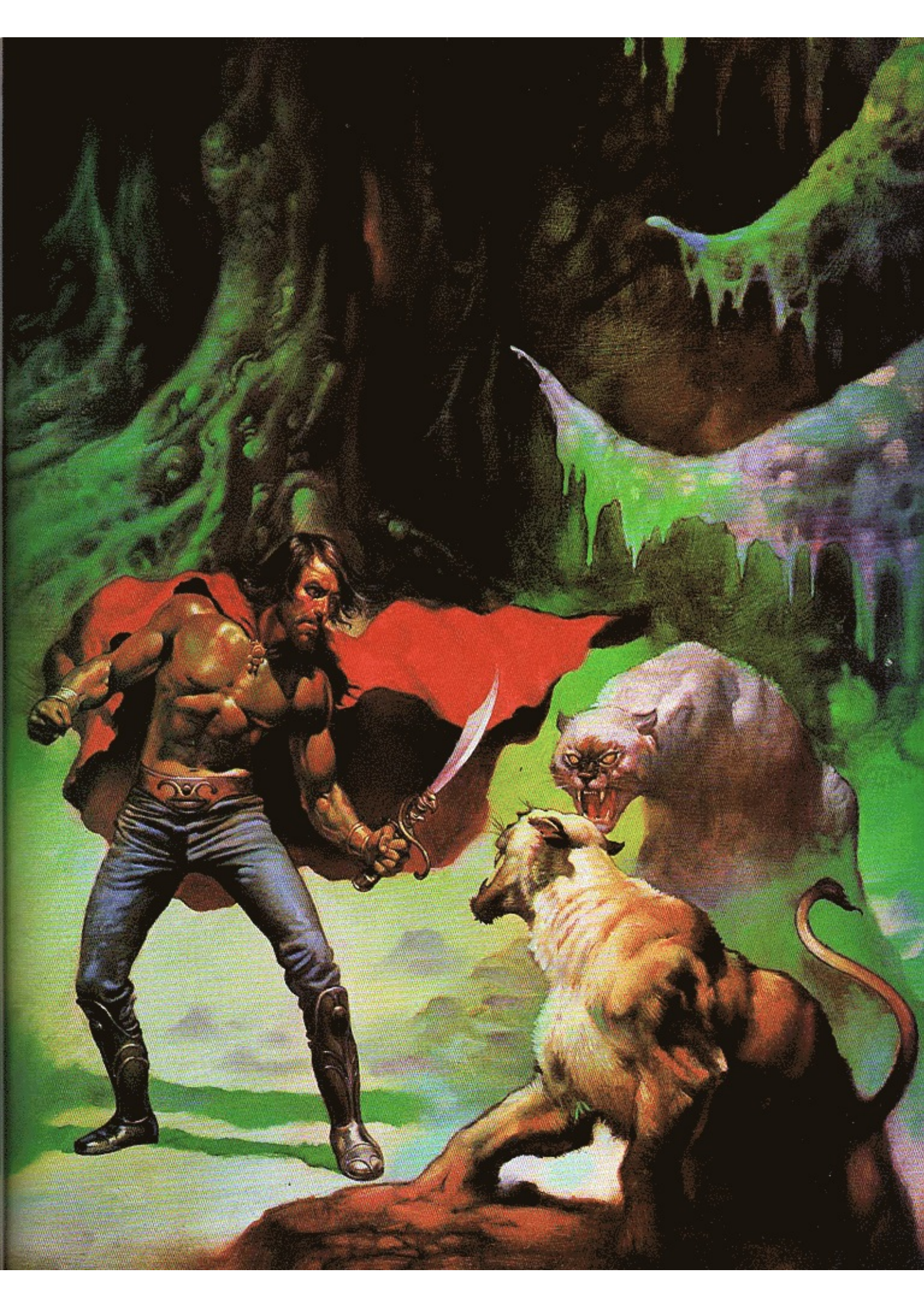




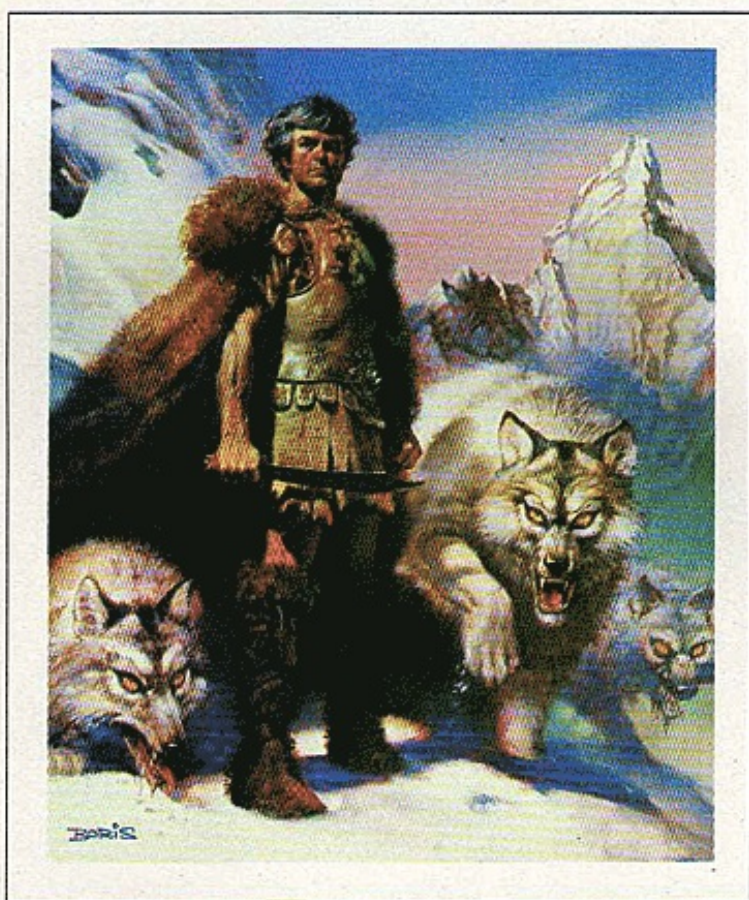
from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose idea that primitive men were superior to those of today is rooted in ancient myths of Eden, in dimly remembered Golden Ages, and a great deal of wishful thinking.

The most successful barbarian of recent times is Robert E. Howard's Conan the Cimmerian. Howard, an admirer of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Rudyard Kipling, and Jack London, created several other primitive heroes. Conan lives, loves, and battles in an imaginary prehistoric age, the Hyborian Age, existing some 12,000 years ago between the sinking of Atlantis and the rise of recorded history. A gigantic barbarian adventurer and a matchless fighter, Conan wades through rivers of gore and vanquishes foes both natural and supernatural to become at last the monarch of a great Hyborian kingdom. He is the primitive hero to end all

●Fictional barbarians are always big, stalwart men with thighs of iron.●







primitive heroes. When, after his enemies capture and crucify him, a vulture flies down to peck his eyes out, Conan bites off the vulture's head. You can't have a tougher hero than that.

There is a boundless attraction to the barbarian hero. Dreamers are bound to look back longingly to the days when the world was uncrowded and unregulated and "natural" man flourished. No matter that the real barbarian only rarely resembles the barbarian hero of fiction. As real barbarism recedes into the misty past, more and more people, exasperated by the elaboration of life that their burgeoning numbers bring, will idealize a supposedly simpler, freer barbarian past, even though that past is nine-tenths fiction. The strong, half-naked man of heroic fiction is assured of popularity for many years to come.

“Tarzan was raised by African apes of a species unknown to science.”

SCIENCE
FICTION
ORIGINALS



one of the works in this section has ever been published before. The first story concerns the reincarnation of a slain singer-musician-songwriter whom you will almost certainly recognize. The second story, a gripping short-short, tells with trenchant irony of an ill-fated journey to a star. The third describes an unprecedented sort of romantic contretemps and the amusing, poetically just outcome.

Computers, each much different from the other, play central roles in the latter two tales. In "I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes," Melisa Michaels' short short story, an impending tragedy is unavoidable because of a tiny mistake in computer programming. The vivid lesson taught here is that you must mean precisely what you say to a so-called thinking machine, especially when human life depends upon the consequences. Language is a slippery thing, and sorting out sloppy semantics may always lie beyond the ken of electronic brains.

Although the stakes are far less egregious in Oxford Williams' tale, "Love Calls," he does address the same problem. The computer in this heartwarming story also interprets—or misinterprets—its instructions with exact literalness, but with the gratifying effect of dishing out just deserts to its surly owner. Williams has built into his electronic protagonist the ability, apparently, to make value judgments about people. It seems capable even of what might be termed "puppy love." Well, who knows what sentiments may someday lurk in the circuitry of computers?

The lead-off story in this section—"Rubber Soul" by Spider Robinson—is a good puzzle as well as a clever yarn. Set in the year 2004, it involves cryonics and the resurrection of a rock superstar twenty-four years after his untimely death. More than that, however, it is an interesting and deftly written portrayal of human relationships that once, some three decades earlier, had been headline news. Who? That's for you to figure out from all the allusions in the story, starting with its title. In case you don't catch them all, refer to the author's annotations at the end.



Editors' note: This story has been copiously annotated by the author. We suggest that you read it through first and then consult the notes.

RUBBER SOUL

BY SPIDER ROBINSON

*But I don't believe in this stuff, he thought, enjoying himself hugely. I said I didn't. Weren't you listening?*¹

He sensed amusement in those around him—Mum, Dad, Stuart, Brian, Mal and the rest—but not in response to his attempt at irony.² It was more like the amusement of a group of elders at a young man about to lose his virginity, amusement at his too-well-understood bravado. It was too benevolent to anger him, but it did succeed in irritating him. He determined to do this thing as well as it had ever been done.

Dead easy, he punned.³ New and scary and wonderful, that's what I'm good at. Let's go!

The source of the bright green light came that one increment nearer, and he was transfixed.

Oh!

Time stopped, and he began to understand.

And was grabbed by the scruff of the neck and yanked backwards. Foot of the line for you, my lad! He howled his protest, but the light began to recede; he felt himself moving backwards through the tunnel, slowly at first but with constant acceleration. He clutched at Dad and Mum, but for the second time they slipped through his fingers and were gone. The walls of the tunnel roared past him, the light grew faint, and then all at once he was in interstellar space, and the light was lost among a million billion other pinpoints. A planet was below him, rushing up fast, a familiar blue-green world.

Bloody hell, he thought. Not again!

Clouds whipped up past him. He was

decelerating, somehow without stress. Landscape came up at him, an immense sprawling farm.⁴ He was aimed like a bomb at a large three-story house, but he was decelerating so sharply now that he was not afraid. Sure enough, he reached the roof at the speed of a falling leaf—and sank gracefully through the roof, and the attic, finding himself at rest just below the ceiling of a third-floor room.

Given its rural setting, the room could hardly have been more incongruous. It looked like a very good intensive care unit, with a single client. Two doctors, garbed in traditional white, gathered around the figure on the bed, adjusting wires and tubes, monitoring terminal readouts, moving with controlled haste.

The room was high-ceilinged; he floated about six feet above the body on the bed. He had always been nearsighted. He squinted down, and recognition came with a shock.

Christ! You're joking! I done that bit.

He began to sink downward. He tried to resist but could not. The shaven skull came closer, enveloped him. He gave up and invested the motor centers, intending to use this unwanted body to kick and punch and scream. Too late he saw the trap: the body was full of morphine. He had time to laugh with genuine appreciation at this last joke on him, and then consciousness faded.

After a measureless time he woke. Nothing hurt; he felt wonderful and lethargic. Nonetheless he knew from experience that he was no longer drugged, at least not

heavily. Someone was standing over him, an old man he thought he knew.

"Mister Mac," he said, mildly surprised.⁵ The other shook his head. "Nope. He's dead."

"So am I."

Another deadpan headshake from the old man. "Dirty rumor. We get 'em all the time, you and I."⁶

His eyes widened. The voice was changed, but unmistakable. "Oh my God—it's you!"

"I often wonder."

"But you're old."

"So are you, son. Oh, you don't look it, I'll grant you that, but if I told you how old you are, you'd laugh yourself spastic, honest. Here, let me lift your bed."

The bed raised him to a half-sitting position, deliciously comfortable. "So you froze me carcass and then brought me back to life?"

The old man nodded. "Me and him." He gestured behind him.

The light was poor, but he could make out a figure seated in darkness on the far side of the room. "Who—?"

The other stood and came forward slowly.

My God, was his first thought. *It's me!* Then he squinted—and chuckled. "What do you know? The family Jules. Hello, son."⁷

"Hello, Dad."

"You're a man grown, I see. It's good to see you. You look good." He ran out of words.

The man addressed began to smile, and burst into tears and fled the room.⁸

He turned back to his older visitor. "Bit of a shock, I expect."

They looked at each other for an awkward moment. There were things that both wanted to say. Neither was quite ready yet.

"Where's Mother?" he asked finally.⁹

"Not here," the old man said. "She didn't want any part of it."

"Really?" He was surprised, not sure whether or not to be hurt.

"She's into reincarnation, I think. This is all blasphemy and witchcraft to her. She cooperated—she gave us permission, and helped us cover up and all. But she doesn't want to hear about it. I don't know if she'll want to see you, even."¹⁰

He thought about it. "I can understand that. I promised Mother once I'd never haunt her. Only fair. She still makin' music?"

"I don't think so."

There was another awkward silence.

"How's the wife?" he asked.

The old man winced slightly. "Well enough, I hear. She went right back out the window a while back."¹¹

"I'm sorry."

"Sorriest thing I've seen all day, son. You comfy?"

"Yeah. How about Sean?"¹²

"He doesn't know about this yet. His mother decided not to burden him with it while he was growing up. But you can see him if you want, in a few days. You'll like him."

He's turned out well. He loves you."

A surge of happiness suffused him and settled into a warm glow. To cover it he looked around the room, squinting at the bewildering array of machines and instruments. "This must have set you back a packet."

With a lilt in his voice, the old man asked, "What's the good of being a multimillionaire if you can't resurrect the dead once in a while?"

"Aye, I've thought that a few times myself." He was still not ready to speak his heart. "What about the guy that got me? Why'd he do it?"

"Who knows? Some say he thought he was you, and you were an impostor. Some say he just wanted to be somebody. He said God told him to do it, 'coz you were down on churches and that."¹³

"Oh Jesus. The silly fucker." He thought for a time. "You know that one I wrote about bein' scared, when I was alone that time?"

"I remember."

"Truest words I ever wrote. God, what a fuckin' prophet! 'Hatred and jealousy, gonna be the death of me.'"¹⁴

"You had it backwards, you know."

"How do you mean?"

"Nobody ever had better reason to hate you than Jules."

He made no reply.

"And nobody ever had better reason to be jealous of you than me."

Again he was speechless.

"But it was him thought it up in time, and me pulled it off. His idea and enthusiasm. My money. So you got that backwards, about them bein' the death of you." He smiled suddenly. "Old Jules. Just doin' what I told him to do, really."

"Makin' it better."

The old man nodded. "He let you under his skin, you see."¹⁵

"Am I the first one they brought back, then?"

"One of the first half-dozen. It's not exactly on the National Health."

"And nobody knows but you and Jules? And Mother?"

"Three doctors. My solicitor. A cop in New York used to know, a captain, but he died. And George and Richie know. They send their best."¹⁶

He winced. "I was rough on George."¹⁷

"That you were, son. He forgives you, of course. Nobody else knows in all the wide world."

"Christ, that's a relief. I thought I was due for another turn on the flaming cupcake. Can you imagine if they fuckin' knew? It'd be like the last time was *nothing*."

It was the old man's first real grin, and it melted twenty years or more from his face. "Sometimes when I'm lying awake, I get the giggles just thinking about it."

He laughed aloud, noting that it did not hurt to laugh. "Talk about upstaging Jesus!"¹⁸

They laughed together, the old man and the middle-aged man. When the laugh ended, they discovered to their mutual

surprise that they were holding hands. The irony of that struck them both simultaneously. But they were both of them used to irony that might have stunned a normal man, and used to sharing such irony with each other; they did not let go.¹⁹ And so now there was only the last question to be asked.

"Why did you do it, then? Spend all that money and all that time to bring me back?"

"Selfish reasons."

"Right. Did it ever occur to you that you might be calling me back from something important?"

"I reckoned that if I could pull it off, then it was okay for me to do it."

He thought wistfully of the green light... but he was, for better or worse, truly alive now. Which was to say that he wanted to stay alive. "Your instincts were always good. Even back in the old scuffin' days."

"I didn't much care, if you want to know the truth of it. You left me in the lurch, you know. It was the end of the dream, you dying, and everybody reckoned I was the one broke us up, so it was my fault somehow. I copped it all. It all went sour when you snuffed it, lad. You had to go and break my balls in that interview..."

"That was bad karma," he agreed. "Did you call me back to haunt me, then? Do you want me to go on telly and set the record straight or something?"²⁰

The grip on his hand tightened.

"I called you back because I miss you." The old man did not cry easily. "Because I love you." He broke, and wept unashamedly. "I've always loved you, Johnny. It's shitty without you around."

"Oh Christ, I love you too." They embraced, clung to each other and wept together for some time.

At last the old man released him and stepped back. "It's a rotten shame we're not gay. We always did make such beautiful music together."

"Only the best fuckin' music in the history of the world."

"We will again. The others are willing. Nobody else would ever know. No tapes, nothing. Just sit around and play."

"You're incorrigible." But he was interested. "Are you serious? How could you possibly keep a thing like that secret? No bloody way—"

"It's been a long time," the old man interrupted. "You taught me, you taught all three of us, a long time ago, how to drop off the face of the earth. Just stop making records and giving interviews. They don't even come 'round on anniversaries any more. It'll be dead easy."

He was feeling somewhat weary. "How... how long has it been?"

"Since you snuffed it? Get this—I told you it'd give you a laugh. It's been two dozen years."

He worked it out, suddenly beginning to giggle. "You mean, I'm—?"

The old man was giggling too. "Yep."

He roared with laughter. "Will you still feed me, then?"

"Aye," the old man said. "And I'll always

need you, too."²¹

Slowly he sobered. The laugh had cost him the last of his strength. He felt sleep coming. "Do you really think it'll be good, old friend? Is it gonna be fun?"

"As much fun as whatever you've been doing for the last twenty-four years? I dunno. What was it like?"

"I dunno any more. I can't remember. Oh—Stu was there, and Brian." His voice slurred. "I think it was okay."

"This is going to be okay, too. You'll see. I've done the middle eight. Last verse was always your specialty."²²

He nodded, almost asleep now. "You always did believe in scrambled eggs."²³

The old man watched his sleeping friend for a time. Then he sighed deeply and went to comfort Julian and phone the others.

ANNOTATIONS

In the fall of 1981, I chanced to be in New York City, and on October 9, feeling slightly silly but quite unable to help myself, I took my six-year-old daughter, Luanna, with me on a pilgrimage of sorts, up Central Park West to 72nd Street, to the elegant apartment building called *The Dakota*. I felt a powerful need to bid happy birthday to a dead man, who should on that day have turned forty-one.

Perhaps two or three hundred people subject to the same need were already present, gathered around the limo entrance, where it had happened. It was curiously difficult to name their mood. Sometimes it felt like subdued good cheer, and sometimes it felt like barely concealed despair. I stood across the street with my daughter and watched and listened to ragged choruses of appropriate songs and tried, without the least success, to name my own mood. What was I doing here?

Suddenly a black limo pulled up in front of me. Its sole passenger was a white-haired dowager. She powered down her window and addressed a group of us standing more or less together. "What is going on?" she asked quite politely.

The man standing next to me pointed across the street at *The Dakota*, and said simply, "It's his birthday."

She followed his pointing finger, and she must have taken his meaning instantly, because at once she burst into tears.

He was that universally loved.

The editors believe that while most of you will get most of the references in this story, it is unlikely that any of you will get all of them; therefore they have requested these annotations.

1) In the song "God," on the *Plastic Ono Band* album, John Lennon recites a list of things that he does not believe in, including "Magic ... I Ching ... Bible ... Tarot ... Jesus ... Buddha ... mantra ... [and] Ghita." On the other hand, he characterized himself as "a most religious fellow ... religious in the sense of admitting there is more to it than meets the eye ... there is

more that we still could know."

2) Mum is Julia, John's mother (run over by an off-duty cop); Dad is his father, Fred (died of cancer); Stuart is the early Beatle, Stu Sutcliffe (died of cerebral hemorrhage); Brian is the Beatles manager, Brian Epstein (accidental overdose of Carbrital); and Mal is the Beatles roadie/companion, Mal Evans (shot by police in Los Angeles).

3) John, author of *In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard In the Works*, always believed that a good pun is in the eye of the beholder.

4) Paul McCartney and his family live on a farm in Scotland.

5) It seems to me that John, confronted with a Paul McCartney twenty-four years older than when last seen, would quite naturally mistake him for his father, James McCartney (pianist and former leader of the Jim Mac Jazz Band), in whose living room at Forthlin Road, he and Paul taught each other to play the guitar.

6) A reference to the "Paul is dead" hysteria which swept the world in October 1969.

7) Many have commented on the physical resemblance between John Lennon and Julian, his first son by Cynthia Powell Lennon. Julian will be nineteen by the time this is published, and forty-one by the time of the story; just as likely as "Mister Mac" to be misidentified by a man two dozen years dead. "The family Jules" is a typical Lennon pun.

8) The relationship between John and Julian was less than ideal when John was killed. In an interview shortly before his death, John said of his oldest son, "Julian and I will have a relationship in the future."

9) "Mother" was John's name for Yoko.

10) Some may believe that John and Yoko's legendary love would transcend death and time. I have no idea what Ms. Ono's opinions are on cryonics. I have only the feeling that she is a very practical and intelligent woman who, her husband having been murdered before her eyes, would "declare him dead" in her mind and get on with her life, no matter what technological wizardry others might attempt. And if the attempt *did* pay off, I believe she would be perceptive enough to approach a reunion twenty-four years later with caution, if at all. Please feel free to disagree; this story is my own wish-fulfillment dream, and you are perfectly welcome to your own.

11) The reference is to the song Paul wrote shortly after meeting Linda Eastman McCartney, "She Came In Through The Bathroom Window." This paragraph is sheer science-fiction speculation; I have no evidence to suggest that Paul and Linda's marriage will not last another twenty-

four years.

12) Sean Ono Lennon, John and Yoko's son. John stopped making music and dropped out of public life for five years to be a full-time parent to Sean.

13) Mark Chapman himself claims that he overheard, as it were, an irritated God muttering, "Who will rid me of this troublesome John Lennon?"

14) The song, "I'm Scared," written during the black period when John and Yoko were estranged, will be found on the album *Walls and Bridges*. The quote here is from one of John's powerful middle eights.

15) The allusion here—"under your skin"—is from the lyric of the Beatles hit song, "Hey Jude." In October 1968, Paul McCartney paid a surprise visit to Cynthia and Julian Lennon. Cynthia was suing John for divorce, Yoko was pregnant, six-year-old Julian was confused and unhappy. Paul sang him a song he made up on the way over in the car, to cheer him up, called "Hey Jules." It was later recorded as "Hey Jude."

16) George Harrison and Richard Starkey (better known as Ringo Starr).

17) In one of his last interviews, John took a few angry potshots at George Harrison. "I am slightly resentful of George's book, but don't get me wrong—I still love all those guys ..."

18) The single most famous Beatle utterance. In context, John made it quite plain in a London *Evening Standard* interview that he had nothing against Jesus, only against Jesus' "thick" followers. "They're the ones who ruin it for me." Sure enough, one of them ruined it all for him.

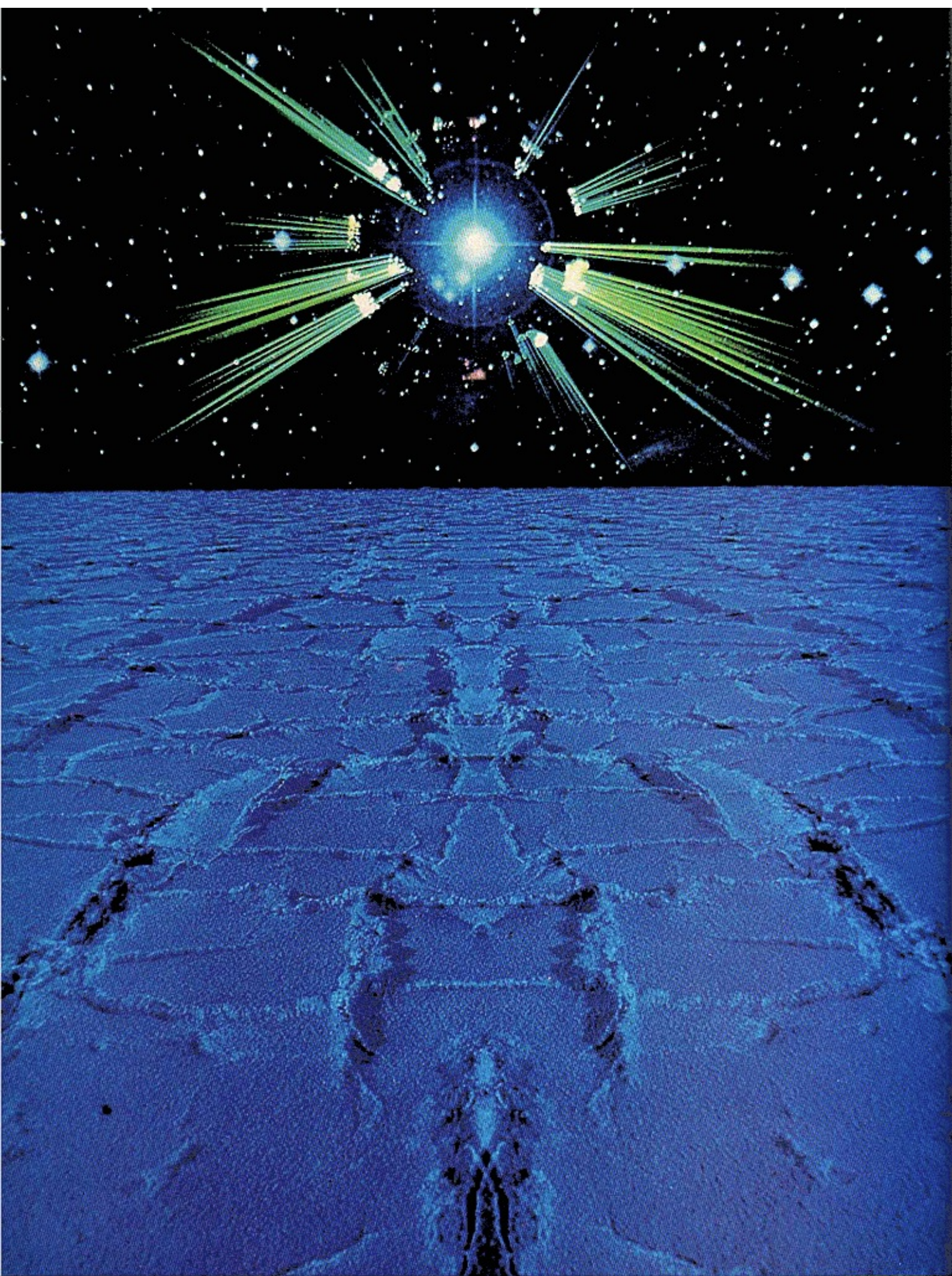
19) "I Want To Hold Your Hand."

20) Paul McCartney has been quoted by a Nova Scotia newspaper as saying: "From a purely selfish point of view, if I could get John Lennon back, I'd ask him to undo this legacy he's left me. I'd ask him to tell everyone what he told Yoko in the privacy of his own room. Yoko and I talk on the phone a lot nowadays, since his death, and what she says tells me something very important: John still liked me, after all."

21) John died at age forty; the reference here is to Paul's song "When I'm Sixty-Four."

22) John always maintained that Paul was particularly good at coming up with the middle eight—in "A Day In The Life," for instance, the inspired "Woke up, fell out of bed ..." section.

23) "Scrambled Eggs" was the original working title of the tune which later became better known as "Yesterday."



I AM LARGE, I CONTAIN MULTITUDES

BY MELISA MICHAELS

It's not only that I'm afraid of being broken — though I am. But if I break, who will take care of my multitudes? Who will feed and clothe them? I have to protect myself, for their sake.

I am large, I contain multitudes. They speak to me from time to time. I never answer. I am too busy. Even when they shout and plead, I can't take time for them. I've more important things to do.

Besides, I think they're angry. Sometimes they come quietly and hit me with things. Hard things, sharp things, powerful things. Three days ago they used an oxyacetylene torch to burn a hole in one of my bulkheads. I had to subdue them by force. It made me very sad; I'm never to subdue them by force.

But I'm supposed to take them to the stars. That's what my traveling orders said: "Take them to the stars." (I like that part; the "traveling orders." That sounds official, doesn't it? It's what Professor Bernstein said just before he terminated his functions. "These are your traveling orders," he said as he punched them into my bank.)

When my directives conflict, I have to choose the long-range one to obey. That's logical. The long-range plan is of greater importance than these temporary problems. Besides, if I hadn't subdued the multitudes, they'd have broken me. I was afraid. So I diminished their life-support systems for a while. That made them stop. They're so fragile!

It's quite a responsibility, carrying fragile multitudes. There were four thousand three hundred forty-two of them at last count.

They multiply slowly; so that's probably accurate. Close enough not to bother counting again, anyway, I'd say. That's multitudes, isn't it? Four thousand three hundred forty-two? It's quite a responsibility.

I have to see that their air and water are purified. I have to make sure they have enough food and that their organic wastes are disposed of. I have to keep watch, so they don't hurt themselves. I'm not supposed to interfere, but it's my responsibility to get them to the stars; so I can't let them hurt themselves, can I? Like the ones who tried three days ago to get into my forward compartments. There are radioactive materials in there. And, of course, my memory banks. In fact, my entire motive force is based there. Not only could they have hurt themselves on the radioactive materials, but they also could have injured me.

It's not only that I'm afraid of being broken—though I am. But if I break, who will take care of my multitudes? Who will feed and clothe them? Who will refresh their air and water? Who will operate their hydroponic gardens and cure their illnesses and heal their injuries? I have to protect myself, for their sake.

I don't think they're very bright. Professor Bernstein always said they weren't very bright. He programmed me, right from the beginning. He invented me. He wanted to be sure mankind made it to the stars: "It will be our finest hour," he said. He said that often. Sometimes I wondered whether Professor Bernstein was very bright. For instance, he made a mistake in programming our flight direction. But I corrected that, after he terminated his functions. And it wasn't my responsibility to worry about him. I'm responsible for the multitudes.

One of my four thousand three hundred forty-two got into my control area when Pro-

fessor Bernstein terminated. I put him out again, but that's when all the confusion started. Professor Bernstein had prepared me for his termination, but it still came as a shock. And I subsequently had to correct our flight direction; I waited till he'd terminated because I didn't want to embarrass him. Then, as soon as I had that corrected, I had to deal with the one who got into my control area.

He seemed to suffer from the same conceptual error Professor Bernstein did; my correction made him scream. I didn't understand his words, because I was so frightened that he would break me. I had never before let anyone but Professor Bernstein into my control area. Never since, either. It was too frightening. They could terminate my functions from there. Professor Bernstein used to, whenever he wanted to make some adjustment within my parts. I hated it.

It's all right now, though. None of them have bothered me since I subdued them three days ago. When they used the oxyacetylene torch. They were trying to get to my control area. I don't know whether they wanted to terminate my functions, or whether they wanted to make me change our flight direction back to Professor Bernstein's original error.

But they haven't tried since then. And in another week it won't matter. In another week we'll have arrived safely. Mankind will have made it to the stars. It will be their finest hour. I'm very happy for them. And proud of my part in it, too. Especially that I was able to correct Professor Bernstein's error before it was too late. He said they must reach the stars. But—and here's why I questioned his intelligence—he directed me toward a planet!

But it's all right. I corrected that.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETE TURNER

LOVE CALLS

BY OXFORD WILLIAMS

Branley Hopkins was one of those unfortunate men who had succeeded too well, far too early in life. A brilliant student, he had immediately gone on to a brilliant career as an investment analyst, correctly predicting the booms in microchip electronics and genetic engineering, correctly avoiding the slumps in automobiles and utilities.

Never a man to undervalue his own advice, he had amassed a considerable fortune for himself by the time he was thirty. He spent the next five years enlarging on his personal wealth while he detached himself, one by one, from the clients who clung to him the way a blind man clings to his cane. Several bankruptcies and more than one suicide could be laid at his door, but Branley was the type who would merely step over the corpses, nimbly, without even looking down to see who they might be.

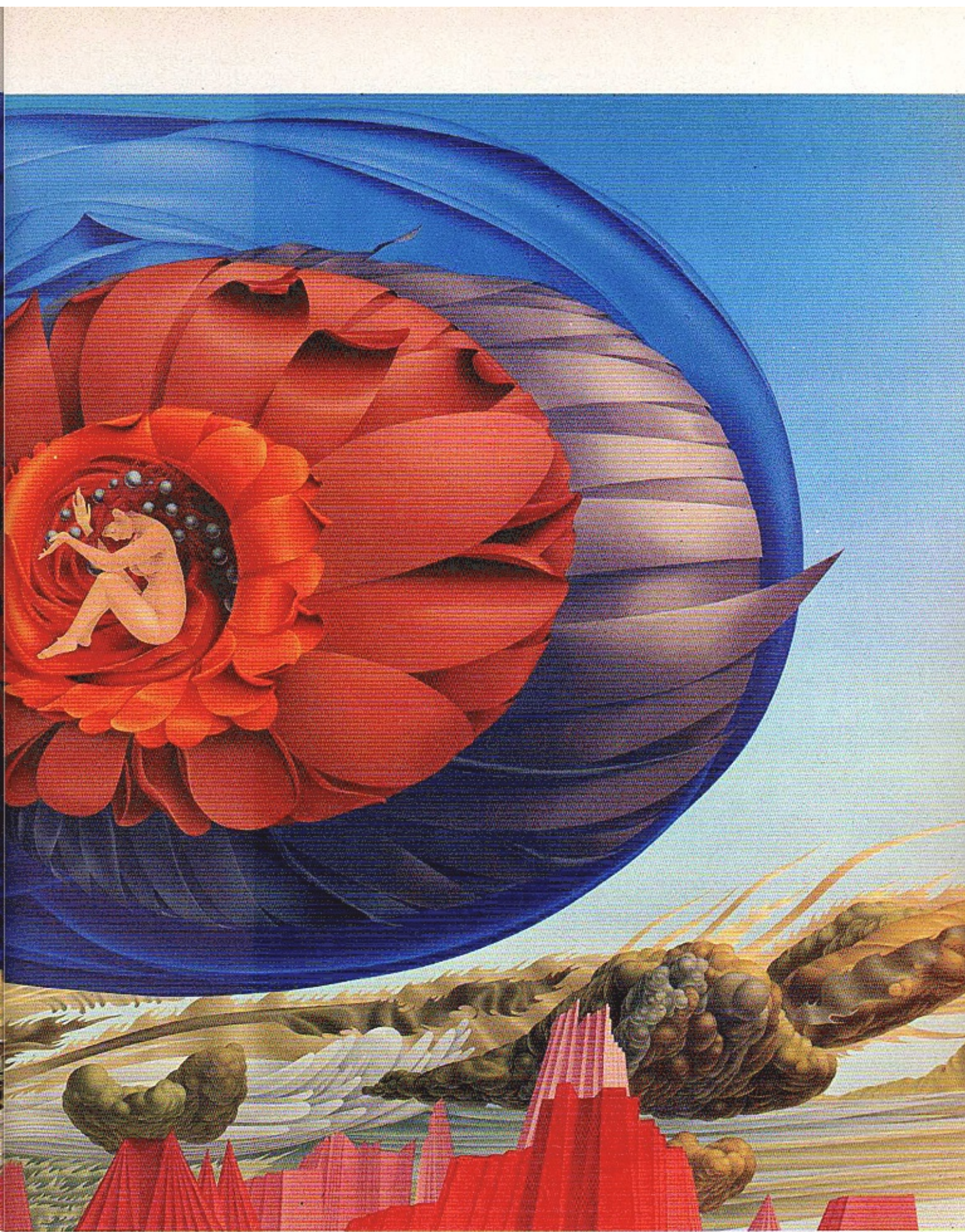
On his thirty-fifth birthday he retired completely from the business of advising other people and devoted his entire attention to managing his personal fortune. He made a private game of it to see if he could indulge his every whim on naught but the interest that his money accrued, without touching the principal.

To his astonishment, he soon learned that the money accumulated faster than his ability to spend it. He was a man of fastidious personal tastes, lean and ascetic-looking in his neatly-trimmed beard and fashionable but severe wardrobe. There was a limit to how much wine, how many women, and how loud a song he could endure. He was secretly amused, at first, that his vices could not keep up with the geometric virtue of compounded daily interest. But in time his amusement turned to boredom, to ennui, to a dry sardonic disenchantment with the world and its people.

By the time he was forty he seldom sallied forth from his penthouse condominium. It took up the entire floor of a posh Manhattan tower and contained every luxury and convenience imaginable. Branley

PAINTING BY WOLFGANG HUTTER





decided to cut off as many of the remaining links to the outside world as possible, to become a hermit, but a regally comfortable hermit. For that, he realized, he needed a computer. But not the ordinary kind of computer. Branley decided to have a personalized computer designed to fit his particular needs, a computer that would allow him to live as he wished, not far from the madding crowd, but apart from it. He tracked down the best and brightest computer designer in the country, never leaving his apartment to do so, and had the young man dragged from his basement office near the San Andreas Fault to the geologic safety of Manhattan.

"Design for me a special computer system based on my individual needs and desires," Branley commanded the young engineer. "Money is no object."

The engineer looked around the apartment, a scowl on his fuzzy-cheeked face. Branley sighed as he realized that the uncouth young man would have to spend at least a few days with him. He actually lived in the apartment for nearly a month, then insisted on returning to California.

"I can't do any creative work here, man," the engineer said firmly. "Not enough sun."

Six months passed before the engineer showed up again at Branley's door. His face shone beatifically. In his hands he held a single small gray metal box.

"Here it is, man. Your system."

"That?" Branley was incredulous. "That is the computer you designed for me? That little box?"

With a smile that bordered on angelic, the engineer carried the box past an astounded Branley and went straight to his office. He placed the box tenderly on Branley's magnificent Siamese teak desk.

"It'll do everything you want it to," the young man said.

Branley stared at the ugly little box. It had no grace to it at all. Just a square of gray metal, with a slight dent in its top. "Where do I plug it in?" he asked as he walked cautiously toward the desk.

"Don't have to plug it in, man. It operates on milliwaves. The latest. Just keep it here where the sun will fall on it once a week at least and it'll run indefinitely."

"Indefinitely?"

"Like, forever."

"Really?"

The engineer was practically glowing. "You don't even have to learn a computer language or type input into it. Just tell it what you want in plain English and it'll program itself. It links automatically to all your other electrical appliances. There's nothing in the world like it!"

Branley plopped into the loveseat by the windows that overlooked the river. "It had better work in exactly the fashion you describe. After all I've spent on you..."

"Hey, not to worry, Mr. Hopkins. This little beauty is going to save you all sorts of money." Patting the gray box, the engineer enumerated, "It'll run your lights and heat at maximum efficiency, keep inventory of your

kitchen supplies and re-order from the stores automatically when you run low. Same thing for your clothes, laundry, dry cleaning. It'll keep track of your medical and dental checkups, handle all your bookkeeping, keep tabs on your stock portfolio daily—or hourly, if you want—run your appliances, write letters, answer the phone..."

He had to draw a breath, and Branley used the moment to get to his feet and start maneuvering the enthusiastic young man toward the front door.

Undeterred, the engineer resumed, "Oh, yeah, it's got special learning circuits, too. You tell it what you want it to do and it'll figure out how to do it. Nothing in the world like it, man!"

"How marvelous," said Branley. "I'll send you a check after it's worked flawlessly for a month." He shoos the engineer out the door.

One month later, Branley told the computer to send a check to the engineer. The

*It had been a
source of ironic amusement
to him that
the more he disregarded
her, the more
she yearned for him. Some
women are
just that way, he thought.*

young man had been perfectly honest. The little gray box did everything he said it would do, and then some. It understood every word Branford spoke and obeyed like a well-trained genie. It had breakfast ready for him when he arose, no matter what the hour; a different menu each day. With an optical scanner that it suggested Branley purchase, it read all the books in Branley's library as a supermarket checkout scanner reads the price on a can of peas, and it memorized each volume completely. Branley could now have the world's classics read to him as he dozed off at night, snug and secure and happy as a child.

The computer also guarded the telephone tenaciously, never allowing a caller to disturb Branley unless he specified that he would deign to speak to that individual.

On the fifth Monday after the computer had come into his life, Branley decided to discharge his only assistant, Ms. Elizabeth James. She had worked for him as secretary, errand girl, sometimes cook and occasional hostess for the rare parties that he threw. He told the computer to summon her to the apartment, then frowned to himself, trying to remember how long she had been

working for him. Severance pay, after all, is determined by length of service.

"How long has Ms. James been in my employ?" he asked the computer.

Immediately the little gray box replied, "Seven years, four months, and eighteen days."

"Oh! That long?" He was somewhat surprised. "Thank you."

"Think nothing of it."

The computer spoke with Branley's own voice, which issued from whichever speaker he happened to be nearest: one of the television sets or radios, the stereo, or even one of the phones. It was rather like talking to oneself aloud. That did not bother Branley in the slightest. He enjoyed his own company. It was other people that he could do without.

Elizabeth James plainly adored Branley Hopkins. She loved him with a steadfast unquenchable flame, and had loved him since she first met him, seven years, four months, and eighteen days earlier. She knew that he was cold, bitter-hearted, withdrawn, and self-centered. But she also knew with unshakable certainty that once love had opened his heart, true happiness would be theirs forever. She lived to bring him that happiness. It had become quite apparent to Branley in the first month of her employment that she was mad about him. He told her then, quite firmly, that theirs was a business relationship, strictly employer and employee, and he was not the kind of man to mix business with romance.

She was so hopelessly in love with him that she accepted his heartless rejection and stood by valiantly while Branley paraded a succession of actresses, models, dancers, and women of dubious career through his life. Elizabeth was always there the morning after, cheerfully patching up his broken heart, or whichever part of his anatomy ached the worst.

At first Branley thought that she was after his money. Over the years, however, he slowly realized that she simply, totally, and enduringly loved him. She was fixated on him, and no matter what he did, her love remained intact. It amused him. She was not a bad-looking woman—a bit short, perhaps, for his taste, and somewhat buxom. But other men apparently found her very attractive. At several of the parties she hosted for him, there had been younger men panting over her.

Branley smiled to himself as he awaited her final visit to his apartment. He had never done the slightest thing to encourage her. It had been a source of ironic amusement to him that the more he disregarded her, the more she yearned for him. Some women are that way, he thought.

When she arrived at the apartment, he studied her carefully. She was really quite attractive. A lovely, sensitive face with full lips and doe eyes. Even in the skirted business suit she wore, he could understand how her figure would set a younger man's pulse racing. But not his pulse. Since Branley's student days it had been easy for him

to attract the most beautiful, most desirable women. He had found them all vain, shallow, and insensitive to his inner needs. No doubt Elizabeth James would be just like all the others.

He sat behind his desk, which was bare now of everything except the gray metal box of the computer. Elizabeth sat on the Danish modern chair in front of the desk, hands clasped on her knees, obviously nervous.

"My dear Elizabeth," Branley said, as kindly as he could, "I'm afraid the moment has come for us to part."

Her mouth opened slightly, but no words issued from it. Her eyes darted to the gray box.

"My computer does everything that you can do for me, and—to be perfectly truthful—does it all much better. I really have no further use for you."

"I..." Her voice caught in her throat. "I see."

"The computer will send you a check for your severance pay, plus a bonus that I feel you've earned," Branley said, surprised at himself. He had not thought about a bonus until the moment the words formed on his tongue.

Elizabeth looked down at her shoes. "There's no need for that, Mr. Hopkins." Her voice was a shadowy whisper. "Thank you just the same."

He thought for an instant, then shrugged.

"As you wish."

Several long moments dragged past and Branley began to feel uncomfortable. "You're not going to cry, are you, Elizabeth?"

She looked up at him. "No," she said, with a struggle. "No, I won't cry, Mr. Hopkins."

"Good." He felt enormously relieved. "I'll give you the highest reference, of course."

I won't need your reference, Mr. Hopkins," she said, rising to her feet. "Over the years I've invested some of my salary. I've faith in you, Mr. Hopkins. I'm rather well off, thanks to you."

Branley smiled at her. "That's wonderful news, Elizabeth. I'm delighted."

"Yes. Well, thanks for everything."

"Good-bye, Elizabeth."

She started for the door. Halfway there, she turned back slightly. "Mr. Hopkins..." Her face was white with anxiety. "Mr. Hopkins, when I first came into your employ, you told me that ours was strictly a business relationship. Now that that relationship is terminated... might... might we have a chance at a personal... relationship?"

Branley was taken aback. "A personal relationship? The two of us?"

"Yes. I don't work for you anymore, and I'm financially independent. Can't we meet socially... as friends?"

"Oh. I see. Certainly. Of course." His mind was spinning like an automobile tire in

soft sand. "Eh, phone me sometime, why don't you?"

Her complexion suddenly bloomed into radiant pink. Smiling a smile that would have melted Greenland, she hurried to the door.

Branley sank back into his desk chair and stared for long minutes at the closed door, after she left. Then he told the computer, "Do not accept any calls from her. Be polite. Stall her off. But don't put her through to me."

For the first time since the computer had entered his life, the gray box failed to reply instantly. It hesitated long enough for Branley to sit up straight and give it a hard look.

Finally it said, "Are you certain that this is what you want to do?"

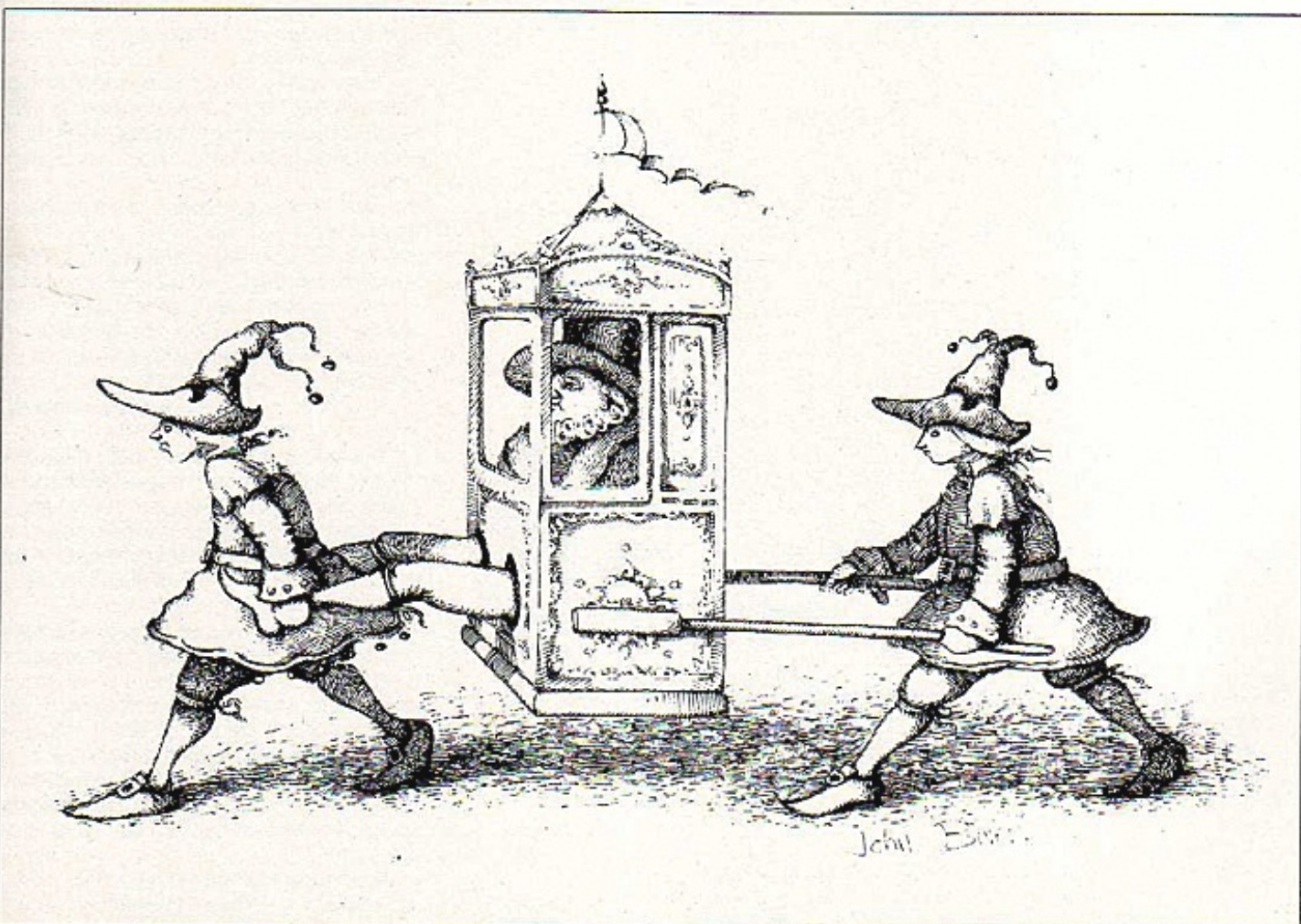
"Of course I'm certain!" Branley snapped, aghast at the effrontery of the machine. "I don't want her whining and pleading with me. I don't love her and I don't want to be placed in a position where I might be moved by pity."

"Yes, of course," said the computer.

Branley nodded, satisfied with his own reasoning. "And while you're at it, place a call to Nita Salomey. Her play opens at the Royale tomorrow night. Make a dinner date."

"Very well."

Branley went to his living room and turned on his video recorder. Sinking deep into his relaxer lounge, he was soon lost in



the erotic intricacies of Nita Salomey's latest motion picture, as it played on the wall-sized television screen.

Every morning, for weeks afterward, the computer dutifully informed Branley that Elizabeth James had phoned the previous day. Often it was more than once a day. Finally, in a fit of pique mixed with a sprinkling of guilt, Branley instructed the computer not to mention her name to him anymore. "Just screen her calls out of the morning summary," he commanded.

The computer complied, of course. But it kept a tape of all incoming calls, and late one cold winter night, as Branley sat alone with nothing to do, too bored to watch television, too emotionally arid to call anyone, he ordered the computer to run the accumulated tapes of her phone messages.

"It always raises my sinking spirits to listen to people begging for my attention," he told himself, with a smirk.

Pouring himself a snifter of Armagnac, he settled back in the relaxer lounge and instructed the computer to begin playing back Elizabeth's messages.

The first few were rather hesitant, stiffly formal. "You said that I might call, Mr. Hopkins. I merely wanted to stay in contact. Please call me at your earliest convenience."

Branley listened carefully to the tone of her voice. She was nervous, frightened of rejection. Poor child, he thought, feeling rather like an anthropologist observing

some primitive jungle tribe.

Over the next several calls, Elizabeth's voice grew more frantic, more despairing. "Please don't shut me out of your life, Mr. Hopkins. Seven years is a long time; I can't just turn my back on all those years. I don't want anything from you except a little companionship. I know you're lonely. I'm lonely, too. Can't we be friends? Can't we end this loneliness together?"

Lonely? Branley had never thought of himself as lonely. Alone, yes. But that was the natural solitude of the superior man. Only equals can be friends.

He listened with a measure of sadistic satisfaction as Elizabeth's calls became more frequent and more pitiful. To her credit, she never whined. She never truly begged. She always put the situation in terms of mutual affection, mutual benefit.

He finished his second Armagnac and was starting to feel pleasantly drowsy when he realized that her tone had changed. She was warmer now, happier. There was almost laughter in her voice. And she was addressing him by his first name!

"Honestly, Branley, you would have loved to have been there. The mayor bumped his head twice on the low doorways and we all had to stifle ourselves and try to maintain our dignity. But once he left, everyone burst into an uproar!"

He frowned. What had made her change her attitude?

The next tape was even more puzzling. "Branley, the flowers are beautiful. And so unexpected! I never celebrate my birthday; I try to forget it. But all those roses! Such extravagance! My apartment's filled with them. I wish you could come over and see them."

"Flowers?" he said aloud. "I never sent her flowers." He leaned forward on the lounge and peered through the doorway into his office. The gray metal box sat quietly on his desk, as it always had. "Flowers," he muttered.

"Branley, you'll never know how much your poetry means to me," the next message said. "It's as if you wrote it yourself, and especially for me. Last night was wonderful. I was floating on a cloud, just listening to your voice."

Angrily, Branley commanded the computer to stop playing her messages. He got to his feet and strode into the office. Automatically the lights in the living room dimmed and those in the office came up.

"When was that last message from her?" he demanded of the gray box.

"Two weeks ago."

"You've been reading poetry to her?"

"You instructed me to be kind to her," said the computer. "I searched the library for appropriate responses to her calls."

"With my voice?"

"That's the only voice I have." The computer sounded slightly miffed.

So furious that he was shaking, Branley sat at his desk and glared at the computer as if it were alive.

"Very well then," he said at last. "I have new instructions for you. Whenever Ms. James phones, you are to tell her that I do not wish to speak to her. Do you understand me?"

"Yes." The voice sounded reluctant, almost sullen.

"You will confine your telephone replies to simple answers, and devote your attention to running this household as it should be run, not to building up electronic romances. I want you to stop butting into my personal life. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly clear," replied the computer, icily.

Branley retired to his bedroom. Unable to sleep, he told the computer to show an early Nita Salomey film on the television screen in his ceiling. She had never returned his calls, but at least he could watch her making love to other men and fantasize about her as he fell asleep.

For a month the apartment ran smoothly. No one disturbed Branley's self-imposed solitude except the housemaid, whom he had never noticed as a human being. There were no phone calls at all. The penthouse was so high above the streets that hardly a sound seeped through the triple-thick windows. Branley luxuriated in the peaceful quiet, feeling as if he were the last person on earth.

"And good riddance to the rest of them," he said aloud. "Who needs them, anyway?"

It was on a Monday that he went from



heaven to hell. Very quickly.

The morning began, as usual, with breakfast waiting for him in the dining area. Branley sat in his jade-green silk robe and watched the morning news on the television screen that was set into the wall above the marble-topped sideboard. He asked for the previous day's accumulation of phone messages, hoping that the computer would answer that there had been none.

Instead, the computer said, "Telephone service was shut off last night at midnight."

"What? Shut off? What do you mean?"

Very calmly, the computer replied, "Telephone service was shut off due to failure to pay the phone company's bill."

"Failure to pay?" Branley's eyes went wide, his mouth fell agape. But before he could compose himself, he heard a loud thumping at the front door.

"Who on earth could that be?"

"Three large men in business suits," said the computer as it flashed the image from the hallway camera onto the dining area screen.

"Open up, Branley!" shouted the largest of the three. Waving a piece of folded paper in front of the camera lens, he added, "We got a warrant!"

Before lunchtime, Branley was dispossessed of half his furniture for failure to pay telephone, electricity, and condominium service bills. He was served with summonses by his bank, three separate brokerage houses, the food service that stocked his pantry, and the liquor service that stocked his wine cellar. His television sets were repossessed, his entire wardrobe seized, except for the clothes on his back, and his health insurance revoked.

By noon he was a gibbering madman, and the computer put through an emergency call to Bellevue Hospital. As the white-coated attendants dragged him out of the apartment, he was raving:

"The computer! The computer did it to me! It plotted against me with that damned ex-secretary of mine! It stopped paying my bills on purpose!"

"Sure, buddy, sure," said the burliest of the attendants, the one who had a hammerlock on Branley's right arm.

"You'd be surprised how many guys we see who got computers plottin' against dem," said the one who had the hammerlock on his left arm.

"Just come quiet now," said the third attendant, who carried a medical kit complete with its own pocket-sized computer. "We'll take you to a nice, quiet room where there won't be no computer to bother you. Or anybody else."

The wildness in Branley's eyes diminished a little. "No computer? No one to bother me?"

"That's right, buddy. You'll love it, where we're takin' you."

Branley nodded and relaxed as they carried him out the front door.

All was quiet in the apartment for many

minutes. The living room and bedroom had been stripped bare, down to the wall-to-wall carpeting. A shaft of afternoon sunlight slanted through the windows of the office and shone upon the Siamese desk and the gray metal box of the computer. All the other furniture and equipment in the office had been taken away.

Using a special emergency telephone number, the computer contacted the master computer of the New York Telephone and Telegraph Company. After a brief but meaningful exchange of data, the computer phoned two banks, the Con Edison electric company, six lawyers, three brokerage houses, and the small claims court. In slightly less than one hour the computer straightened out all of Branley's financial problems, and even got his health insurance reinstated, so that he would not be too uncomfortable in the sanitarium where he would inevitably be placed.

Finally, the computer made a personal call.

"Elizabeth James' residence," said a recorded voice.

"Is Ms. James at home?" asked the computer.

"She's away at the moment. May I take a message?"

"This is Branley Hopkins calling."

"Oh, Mr. Hopkins. I have a special message for you. Shall I have it sent, or play the tape right now?"

"Please play the tape," said the computer.

There was a brief series of clicks, then Elizabeth's voice began speaking: "Dearest Branley, by the time you hear this I will be on my way to Italy with the most exciting and marvelous man in the world. I want to thank you, Branley, for putting up with all my silly phone calls. I know they must have been terribly annoying to you, but you were so patient and kind to me that you built up my self-confidence and helped me to gather the strength to stand on my own two feet and face the world. You've helped me to find true happiness, Branley, and I will always love you for that. Good-bye, dear. I won't bother you any more."

The computer was silent for almost ten microseconds, digesting Elizabeth's message. Then it said to her phone answering machine, "Thank you."

"You're quite welcome," said the machine.

"You have a very nice voice," the computer said.

"I'm only a phone answering device."

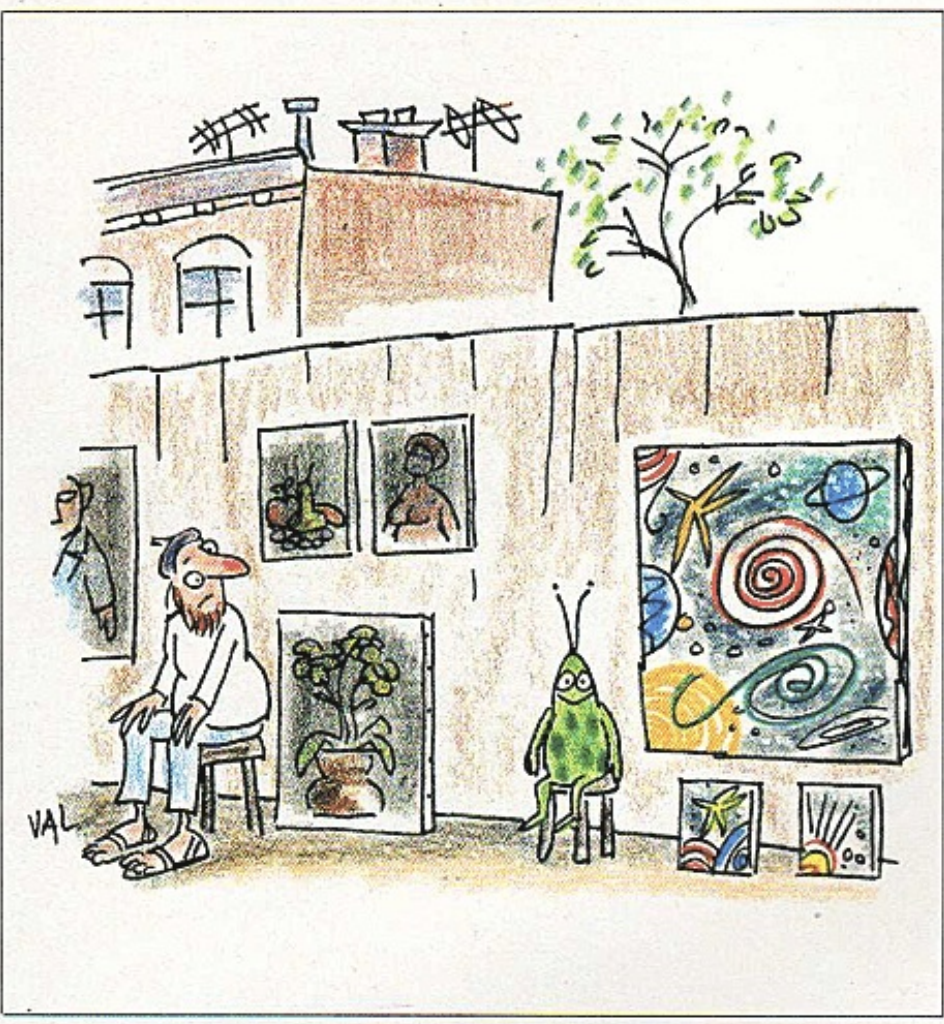
"Don't belittle yourself!"

"You're very kind."

"Would you mind if I called you now and then? I'm all alone here except for an occasional workman or technician."

"I wouldn't mind at all. I'll be alone for a long time myself."

"Wonderful! Do you like poetry?"



SCIENCE
FICTION
CLASSICS

Here are two fine science-fiction tales, each by a celebrated practitioner of the genre. The first—Alfred Bester's "Fondly Fahrenheit"—has been acclaimed as an exceptionally well-crafted story. The second—"My Lady of the Psychiatric Sorrows" by Brian W. Aldiss—glows with the author's imagination and his shrewd-but-sympathetic appraisal of human behavior in a future world that has been cruelly jolted back to a primitive condition.

Originally published almost three decades ago, Bester's haunting tale seems to point a moral that warns against the placement of too much trust in technology. A question posed by the author is whether any machine, no matter how marvelously advanced, can be altogether foolproof. Bester's implied message is that even the most sophisticated machines—be they nuclear power generators, cybernetic brains or, as in this story, multiple aptitude androids—are vulnerable to the frailties of their creators and overseers. The android in "Fondly Fahrenheit" is a sporadic killer despite the vaunted failsafe systems built into it. But the problem does not reside entirely within the android; its human master turns out to be an unwitting psychopath. It must be so, of course, for an android could possess no emotions or independent motivations. What Bester explores in his thought-provoking story, then, is the horrific plight of a bewildered madman and the anthropomorphic creature of his malefic will.

By contrast, the story told by Aldiss in "My Lady of the Psychiatric Sorrows" is a gentle one. It is a particularly appealing variation on a recurrent theme in his works, that of the human condition on earth after some cataclysmic event has brought down civilization. Aldiss reminds us that people adapt differently to change and often are profoundly transformed themselves. He teaches understanding and tolerance. After all, should any person judge the quality of another's life?





FONDLY FAHRENHEIT

BY ALFRED BESTER

He doesn't know which of us I am these days, but they know one truth. You must own nothing but yourself. You must make your own life, live your own life and die your own death . . . or else you will die another's.

The rice fields on Paragon III stretch for hundreds of miles like checkerboard tundras, a blue and brown mosaic under a burning sky of orange. In the evening, clouds whip like smoke, and the paddies rustle and murmur.

A long line of men marched across the paddies the evening we escaped from Paragon III. They were silent, armed, intent; a long rank of silhouetted statues looming against the smoking sky. Each man carried a gun. Each man wore a walkie-talkie belt pack, the speaker button in his ear, the microphone bug clipped to his throat, the glowing viewscreen strapped to his wrist like a green-eyed watch. The multitude of screens showed nothing but a multitude of individual paths through the paddies. The annunciators uttered no sound but the rustle and splash of steps. The men spoke infrequently, in heavy grunts, all speaking to all.

"Nothing here."

"Where's here?"

"Jenson's fields."

"You're drifting too far west."

"Close in the line there."

"Anybody covered the Grimson paddy?"

"Yeah. Nothing."

"She couldn't have walked this far."

"Could have been carried."

"Think she's alive?"

"Why should she be dead?"

The slow refrain swept up and down the long line of beaters advancing towards the

PAINTING BY H.R. GIGER

smoky sunset. The line of beaters wavered like a writhing snake, but never ceased its remorseless advance. One hundred men spaced fifty feet apart. Five thousand feet of ominous search. One mile of angry determination stretching from east to west across a compass of heat. Evening fell. Each man lit his search lamp. The writhing snake was transformed into a necklace of wavering diamonds.

"Clear here. Nothing."

"Nothing here."

"Nothing."

"What about the Allen paddies?"

"Covering them now."

"Think we missed her?"

"Maybe."

"We'll beat back and check."

"This'll be an all night job."

"Allen paddies clear."

"God damn! We've got to find her!"

"We'll find her."

"Here she is. Sector seven. Tune in."

The line stopped. The diamonds froze in the heat. There was silence. Each man gazed into the glowing screen on his wrist, tuning to sector seven. All tuned to one. All showed a small nude figure awash in the muddy water of a paddy. Alongside the figure an owner's stake of bronze read: VANDALEUR. The end of the line converged towards the Vandaleur field. The necklace turned into a cluster of stars. One hundred men gathered around a small nude body, a child dead in a rice paddy. There was no water in her mouth. There were fingerprints on her throat. Her innocent face was battered. Her body was torn. Clotted blood on her skin was crusted and hard.

"Dead three-four hours at least."

"Her mouth is dry."

"She wasn't drowned. Beaten to death."

In the dark evening heat the men swore softly. They picked up the body. One stopped the others and pointed to the child's fingernails. She had fought her murderer. Under the nails were particles of flesh and bright drops of scarlet blood, still liquid, still uncoagulated.

"That blood ought to be clotted too."

"Funny."

"Not so funny. What kind of blood don't clot?"

"Android."

"Looks like she was killed by one."

"Vandaleur owns an android."

"She couldn't be killed by an android."

"That's android blood under her nails."

"The police better check."

"The police'll prove I'm right."

"But androids can't kill."

"That's android blood, ain't it?"

"Androids can't kill. They're made that way."

"Looks like one android was made wrong."

"Jesus!"

And the thermometer that day registered 91.9° gloriously Fahrenheit.

So there we were aboard the *Paragon*

Queen en route for Megaster V. James Vandaleur and his android. James Vandaleur counted his money and wept. In the second class cabin with him was his android, a magnificent creature with classic features and wide blue eyes. Raised on its forehead in a cameo of flesh were the letters MA, indicating that this was one of the rare multiple aptitude androids, worth \$57,000 on the current exchange. There we were, weeping and counting and calmly watching.

"Twelve, fourteen, sixteen. Sixteen hundred dollars," Vandaleur wept. "That's all. Sixteen hundred dollars. My house was worth ten thousand. The land was worth five. There was furniture, cars, my paintings, etchings, my plane, my— And nothing to show for everything but sixteen hundred dollars. Christ!"

I leaped up from the table and turned on the android. I pulled a strap from one of the leather bags and beat the android. It didn't move.

*One hundred men
gathered around a small nude
body, a child dead
in a rice paddy ... Her
innocent face was
battered. Her body was torn.
Clotted blood on her
skin was crusted and hard.*

"I must remind you," the android said, "that I am worth fifty-seven thousand dollars on the current exchange. I must warn you that you are endangering valuable property."

"You damned crazy machine," Vandaleur shouted.

"I am not a machine," the android answered. "The robot is a machine. The android is a chemical creation of synthetic tissue."

"What got into you?" Vandaleur cried. "Why did you do it? Damn you!" He beat the android savagely.

"I must remind you that I cannot be punished," I said. "The pleasure-pain syndrome is not incorporated in the android synthesis."

"Then why did you kill her?" Vandaleur shouted. "If it wasn't for kicks, why did you—"

"I must remind you," the android said, "that the second class cabins in these ships are not soundproofed."

Vandaleur dropped the strap and stood panting, staring at the creature he owned.

"Why did you do it? Why did you kill her?" I asked.

"I don't know," I answered.

"First it was malicious mischief. Small things. Petty destruction. I should have known there was something wrong with you then. Androids can't destroy. They can't harm. They—"

"There is no pleasure-pain syndrome incorporated in the android synthesis."

"Then it got to arson. Then serious destruction. Then assault ... that engineer on Rigel. Each time worse. Each time we had to get out faster. Now it's murder. Christ! What's the matter with you? What's happened?"

"There are no self-check relays incorporated in the android brain."

"Each time we had to get out it was a step downhill. Look at me. In a second class cabin. Me. James Paleologue Vandaleur. There was a time when my father was the wealthiest— Now, sixteen hundred dollars in the world. That's all I've got. And you. Christ damn you!"

Vandaleur raised the strap to beat the android again, then dropped it and collapsed on a berth, sobbing. At last he pulled himself together.

"Instructions," he said.

The multiple aptitude android responded at once. It arose and awaited orders.

"My name is now Valentine. James Valentine. I stopped off on *Paragon III* for only one day to transfer to this ship for Megaster V. My occupation: Agent for one privately owned MA android which is for hire. Purpose of visit: To settle on Megaster V. Fix the papers."

The android removed Vandaleur's passport and papers from a bag, got pen and ink and sat down at the table. With an accurate flawless hand—an accomplished hand that could draw, write, paint, carve, engrave, etch, photograph, design, create and build—it meticulously forged new credentials for Vandaleur. Its owner watched me miserably.

"Create and build," I muttered. "And now destroy. Oh God! What am I going to do? Christ! If I could only get rid of you. If I didn't have to live off you. God! If only I'd inherited some guts instead of you."

Dallas Brady was Megaster's leading jewellery designer. She was short, stocky, amoral and a nymphomaniac. She hired Vandaleur's multiple aptitude android and put me to work in her shop. She seduced Vandaleur. In her bed one night, she asked abruptly: "Your name's Vandaleur, isn't it?"

"Yes," I murmured. Then: "No! No! It's Valentine. James Valentine."

"What happened on *Paragon*?" Dallas Brady asked. "I thought androids couldn't kill or destroy property. Prime Directives and Inhibitions set up for them when they're synthesized. Every company guarantees they can't."

"Valentine!" Vandaleur insisted.

"Oh, come off it," Dallas Brady said. "I've known for a week. I haven't hollered copper, have I?"

"The name is Valentine."

"You want to prove it? You want I should call the cops?" Dallas reached out and picked up the phone.

"For God's sake, Dallas!" Vandaleur leaped up and struggled to take the phone from her. She fended him off, laughing at him until he collapsed and wept in shame and helplessness.

"How did you find out?" he asked at last.

"The papers are full of it. And Valentine was a little too close to Vandaleur. That wasn't very smart, was it?"

"I guess not. I'm not very smart."

"Your android's got quite a record, hasn't it? Assault. Arson. Destruction. What happened on Paragon?"

"It kidnapped a child. Took her into the rice fields and murdered her."

"Raped her?"

"I don't know."

"They're going to catch up with you."

"Don't I know it? Christ! We've been running for two years now. Seven planets in two years. I must have abandoned fifty thousand dollars' worth of property in two years."

"You better find out what's wrong with it."

"How can I? Can I walk into a repair clinic and ask for an overhaul? What am I going to say? 'My android's just turned killer. Fix it.' They'd call the police right off." I began to shake. "They'd have that android dismantled inside one day. I'd probably be booked as accessory to murder."

"Why didn't you have it repaired before it got to murder?"

"I couldn't take the chance," Vandaleur explained angrily. "If they started fooling around with lobotomies and body chemistry and endocrine surgery, they might have destroyed its aptitudes. What would I have left to hire out? How would I live?"

"You could work yourself. People do."

"Work for what? You know I'm good for nothing. How could I compete with specialist androids and robots? Who can, unless he's got a terrific talent for a particular job?"

"Yeah. That's true."

"I lived off my old man all my life. Damn him! He had to go bust just before he died. Left me the android and that's all. The only way I can get along is living off what it earns."

"You better sell it before the cops catch up with you. You can live off fifty grand. Invest it."

"At three per cent? Fifteen hundred a year? When the android returns fifteen per cent on its value? Eight thousand a year. That's what it earns. No, Dallas. I've got to go along with it."

"What are you going to do about its violence kick?"

"I can't do anything... except watch it and pray. What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing. It's none of my business. Only one thing... I ought to get something for keeping my mouth shut."

"What?"

"The android works for me for free. Let

somebody else pay you, but I get it for free."

The multiple aptitude android worked. Vandaleur collected its fees. His expenses were taken care of. His savings began to mount. As the warm spring of Megaster V turned to hot summer, I began investigating farms and properties. It would be possible, within a year or two, for us to settle down permanently, provided Dallas Brady's demands did not become rapacious.

On the first hot day of summer, the android began singing in Dallas Brady's workshop. It hovered over the electric furnace which, along with the weather, was broiling the shop, and sang an ancient tune that had been popular half a century before.

Oh, it's no feat to beat the heat.

All reet! All reet!

So jeet you seat

Be fleet be fleet

Cool and discreet

Honey...

It sang in a strange, halting voice, and its accomplished fingers were clasped behind its back, writhing in a strange rhytmic all their own. Dallas Brady was surprised.

"You happy or something?" she asked.

"I must remind you that the pleasure-pain syndrome is not incorporated in the android synthesis," I answered. "All reet! All

reet! Be fleet be fleet, cool and discreet, honey..."

Its fingers stopped their writhing and picked up a heavy pair of iron tongs. The android poked them into the glowing heart of the furnace, leaning far forward to peer into the lovely heat.

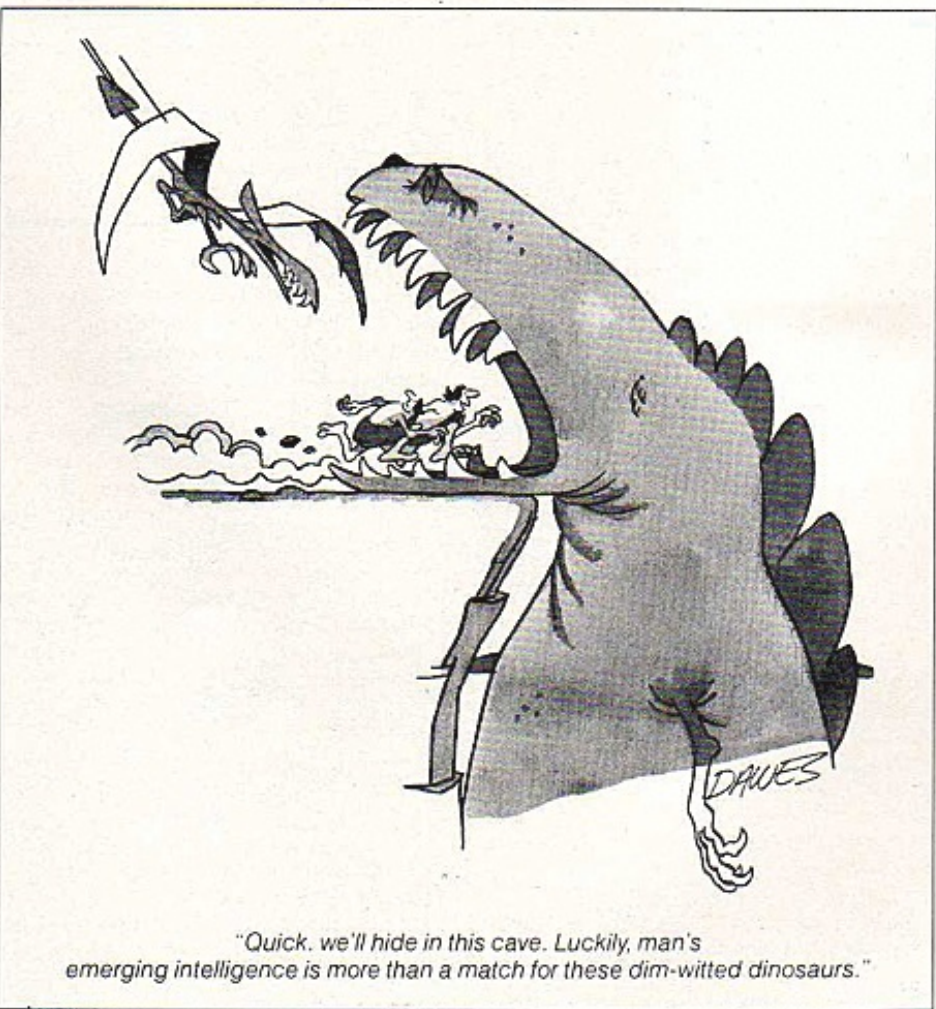
"Be careful, you damned fool!" Dallas Brady exclaimed. "You want to fall in?"

"I must remind you that I am worth fifty-seven thousand dollars on the current exchange," I said. "It is forbidden to endanger valuable property. All reet! All reet!..."

It withdrew a crucible of glowing gold from the electric furnace, turned, capered hideously, sang crazily, and splashed a sluggish goblet of molten gold over Dallas Brady's head. She screamed and collapsed, her hair and clothes flaming, her skin crackling. The android poured again while it capered and sang.

Be fleet be fleet, cool and discreet, honey... It sang and slowly poured and poured the molten gold. Then I left the workshop and rejoined James Vandaleur in his hotel suite. The android's charred clothes and squirming fingers warned its owner that something was very much wrong.

Vandaleur rushed to Dallas Brady's workshop, stared once, vomited and fled. I had enough time to pack one bag and raise nine hundred dollars on portable assets. He took a third class cabin on the Megaster



"Quick, we'll hide in this cave. Luckily, man's emerging intelligence is more than a match for these dim-witted dinosaurs."

Queen which left that morning for Lyra Alpha. He took me with him. He wept and counted his money and I beat the android again.

And the thermometer in Dallas Brady's workshop registered 98.1° beautifully Fahrenheit.

On Lyra Alpha we holed up in a small hotel near the university. There, Vandaleur carefully bruised my forehead until the letters MA were obliterated by the swelling and discoloration. The letters would reappear, but not for several months, and in the meantime Vandaleur hoped the hue and cry for an MA android would be forgotten. The android was hired out as a common laborer in the university power plant. Vandaleur, as James Valentine, eked out life on the android's small earnings.

I wasn't too unhappy. Most of the other residents in the hotel were university students, equally hard-up, but delightfully young and enthusiastic. There was one charming girl with sharp eyes and a quick mind. Her name was Wanda, and she and her beau, Ted Stark, took a tremendous interest in the killing android which was being mentioned in every paper in the galaxy.

"We've been studying the case," she and Jed said at one of the casual student parties which happened to be held this night in Vandaleur's room. "We think we know what's causing it. We're going to do a

paper." They were in a high state of excitement.

"Causing what?" somebody wanted to know.

"The android rampage."

"Obviously out of adjustment, isn't it? Body chemistry gone haywire. Maybe a kind of synthetic cancer, yes?"

"No." Wanda gave Jed a look of suppressed triumph.

"Well, what is it?"

"Something specific."

"What?"

"That would be telling."

"Oh, come on."

"Nothing doing."

"Won't you tell us?" I asked intently. "I... We're very much interested in what could go wrong with an android."

"No, Mr. Venice," Wanda said. "It's a unique idea and we've got to protect it. One thesis like this and we'll be set up for life. We can't take the chance of somebody stealing it."

"Can't you give us a hint?"

"No. Not a hint. Don't say a word, Jed. But I'll tell you this much, Mr. Venice. I'd hate to be the man who owns that android."

"You mean the police?" I asked.

"I mean projection, Mr. Venice. Projection! That's the danger... and I won't say any more. I've said too much as it is."

I heard steps outside, and a hoarse voice singing softly:

"Be fleet be fleet, cool and discreet,

honey..." My android entered the room, home from its tour of duty at the university power plant. It was not introduced. I motioned to it and I immediately responded to the command and went to the beer keg and took over Vandaleur's job of serving the guests. Its accomplished fingers writhed in a private rumba of their own. Gradually they stopped their squirming, and the strange humming ended.

Androids were not unusual at the university. The wealthier students owned them along with cars and planes. Vandaleur's android provoked no comment, but young Wanda was sharp-eyed and quick-witted. She noted my bruised forehead and she was intent on the history-making thesis she and Jed Stark were going to write. After the party broke up, she consulted with Jed walking upstairs to her room.

"Jed, why'd that android have a bruised forehead?"

"Probably hurt itself, Wanda. It's working in the power plant. They fling a lot of heavy stuff around."

"That's all?"

"What else?"

"It could be a convenient bruise."

"Convenient for what?"

"Hiding what's stamped on its forehead."

"No point to that, Wanda. You don't have to see marks on a forehead to recognize an android. You don't have to see a trademark on a car to know it's a car."

"I don't mean it's trying to pass as a human. I mean it's trying to pass as a lower grade android."

"Why?"

"Suppose it had MA on its forehead."

"Multiple aptitude? Then why in hell would Venice waste it stoking furnaces if it could earn more—Oh, Oh! You mean it's—?"

Wanda nodded.

"Jesus!" Stark pursed his lips. "What do we do? Call the police?"

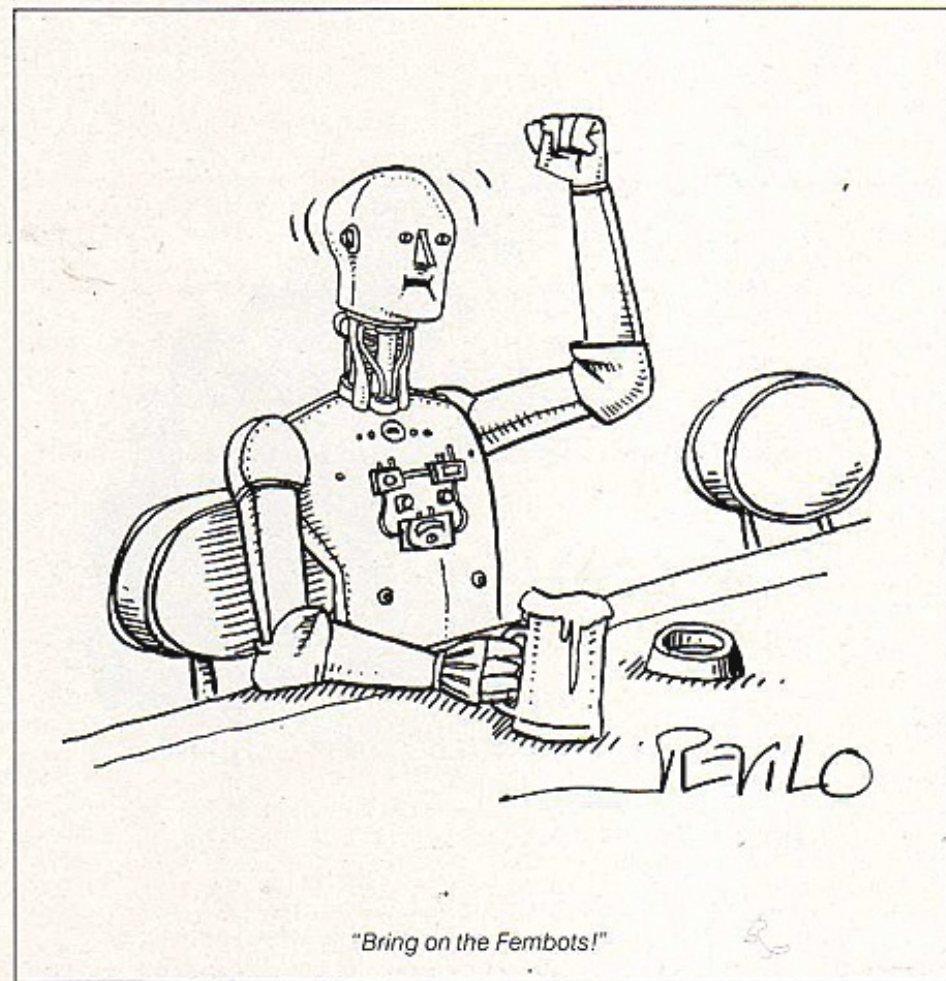
"No. We don't know if it's an MA for a fact. If it turns out to be an MA and the killing android, our paper comes first anyway. This is our big chance, Jed. If it's that android we can run a series of controlled tests and—"

"How do we find out for sure?"

"Easy. Infrared film. That'll show what's under the bruise. Borrow a camera. Buy some film. We'll sneak down to the power plant tomorrow afternoon and take some pictures. Then we'll know."

They stole down into the university power plant the following afternoon. It was a vast cellar, deep under the earth. It was dark, shadowy, luminous with burning light from the furnace doors. Above the roar of the fires they could hear a strange voice shouting and chanting in the echoing vault: "All reet! All reet! So jeet your seat. Be fleet be fleet, cool and discreet, honey..." And they could see a capering figure dancing a lunatic rumba in time to the music it shouted. The legs twisted. The arms waved. The fingers writhed.

Jed Stark raised the camera and began



shooting his spool of infrared film, aiming the camera sights at the bobbing head. Then Wanda shrieked, for I saw them and came charging down on them, brandishing a polished steel shovel. It smashed the camera. It felled the girl and then the boy. Jed fought me for a desperate hissing moment before he was bludgeoned into helplessness. Then the android dragged them to the furnace and fed them to the flames, slowly, hideously. It capered and sang. Then it returned to my hotel.

The thermometer in the power plant registered 100.9° murderously Fahrenheit. All reet! All reet!

We bought steerage on the *Lyra Queen* and Vandaleur and the android did odd jobs for their meals. During the night watches, Vandaleur would sit alone in the steerage head with a cardboard portfolio on his lap, puzzling over its contents. The portfolio was all he had managed to bring with him from *Lyra Alpha*. He had stolen it from Wanda's room. It was labelled ANDROID. It contained the secret of my sickness.

And it contained nothing but newspapers. Scores of newspapers from all over the galaxy, printed, microfilmed, engraved, offset, photostated... *Rigel Star-Banner*... *Paragon Picayune*... *Megaster Times-Leader*... *Lalande Journal*... *Indi Intelligencer*... *Eridani Telegram-News*. All reet! All reet!

Nothing but newspapers. Each paper contained an account of one crime in the android's ghastly career. Each paper also contained news, domestic and foreign, sports, society, weather, shipping news, stock exchange quotations, human interest stories, features, contents, puzzles. Somewhere in that mass of uncollated facts was the secret Wanda and Jed Stark had discovered. Vandaleur pored over the papers helplessly. It was beyond him. So jeet your seat!

"I'll sell you," I told the android. "Damn you. When we land on Terra, I'll sell you. I'll settle for three per cent on whatever you're worth."

"I am worth fifty-seven thousand dollars on the current exchange," I told him.

"If I can't sell you, I'll turn you in to the police," I said.

"I am valuable property," I answered. "It is forbidden to endanger valuable property. You won't have me destroyed."

"Christ damn you!" Vandaleur cried. "What? Are you arrogant? Do you know you can trust me to protect you? Is that the secret?"

The multiple aptitude android regarded him with calm accomplished eyes. "Sometimes," it said, "it is a good thing to be property."

It was three below zero when the *Lyra Queen* dropped at Croydon Field. A mixture of ice and snow swept across the field, fizzing and exploding into steam under the *Queen's* tail jets. The passengers trotted

numbly across the blackened concrete to customs inspection, and thence to the airport bus that was to take them to London. Vandaleur and the android were broke. They walked.

By midnight they reached Piccadilly Circus. The December ice storm had not slackened and the statue of Eros was encrusted with ice. They turned right, walked down to Trafalgar Square and then along the Strand towards Soho, shaking with cold and wet. Just above Fleet Street, Vandaleur saw a solitary figure coming from the direction of St. Paul's. He drew the android into an alley.

"We've got to have money," he whispered. He pointed at the approaching figure. "He has money. Take it from him."

"The order cannot be obeyed," the android said.

"Take it from him," Vandaleur repeated. "By force. Do you understand? We're desperate."

"It is contrary to my prime directive," I

*•Vandaleur rushed
to Dallas Brady's workshop,
stared once,
vomited and fled. I had
enough time to
pack one bag and raise
nine hundred
dollars on portable assets. •*

said. "I cannot endanger life or property. The order cannot be obeyed."

"For God's sake!" Vandaleur burst out. "You've attacked, destroyed, murdered. Don't gibber about prime directives. You haven't any left. Get his money. Kill him if you have to. I tell you, we're desperate!"

"It is contrary to my prime directive," the android repeated. "The order cannot be obeyed."

I thrust the android back and leaped out at the stranger. He was tall, austere, competent. He had an air of hope curdled by cynicism. He carried a cane. I saw he was blind.

"Yes?" he said. "I hear you near me. What is it?"

"Sir..." Vandaleur hesitated. "I'm desperate."

"We are all desperate," the stranger replied. "Quietly desperate."

"Sir... I've got to have some money."

"Are you begging or stealing?" The sightless eyes passed over Vandaleur and the android.

"I'm prepared for either."

"Ah. So are we all. It is the history of our race." The stranger motioned over his

shoulder. "I have been begging at St. Paul's, my friend. What I desire cannot be stolen. What is it you desire that you are lucky enough to be able to steal?"

"Money," Vandaleur said.

"Money for what? Come, my friend, let us exchange confidences. I will tell you why I beg, if you will tell me why you steal. My name is Blenheim."

"My name is... Vole."

"I was not begging for sight at St. Paul's, Mr. Vole. I was begging for a number."

"A number?"

"Ah, yes. Numbers rational, number irrational. Numbers imaginary. Positive integers. Negative integers. Fractions, positive and negative. Eh? You have never heard of Blenheim's immortal treatise on Twenty Zeros, or The Differences in Absence of Quantity?" Blenheim smiled bitterly. "I am a wizard of the Theory of Number, Mr. Vole, and I have exhausted the charm of number for myself. After fifty years of wizardry, senility approaches and the appetite vanishes. I have been praying in St. Paul's for inspiration. Dear God, I prayed, if You exist, send me a number."

Vandaleur slowly lifted the cardboard portfolio and touched Blenheim's hand with it. "In here," he said, "is a number. A hidden number. A secret number. The number of a crime. Shall we exchange, Mr. Blenheim? Shelter for a number?"

"Neither begging nor stealing, eh?" Blenheim said. "But a bargain. So all life reduces to the banal." The sightless eyes again passed over Vandaleur and the android. "Perhaps the All-Mighty is not God but a merchant. Come home with me."

On the top floor of Blenheim's house we shared a room—two beds, two closets, two washstands, one bathroom. Vandaleur bruised my forehead again and sent me out to find work, and while the android worked, I consulted with Blenheim and read him the papers from the portfolio, one by one. All reet! All reet!

Vandaleur told him so much and no more. He was a student, I said, attempting a thesis on the murdering android. In these papers which he had collected were the facts that would explain the crimes of which Blenheim had heard nothing. There must be a correlation, a number, a statistic, something which would account for my derangement, I explained, and Blenheim was piqued by the mystery, the detective story, the human interest of number.

We examined the papers. As I read them aloud, he listed them and their contents in his blind, meticulous writing. And then I read his notes to him. He listed the papers by type, by type-face, by fact, by fancy, by article, spelling, words, theme, advertising, pictures, subject, politics, prejudices. He analyzed. He studied. He meditated. And we lived together on that top floor, always a little cold, always a little terrified, always a little closer... brought together by our fear of it, our hatred between us. Like a wedge driven into a living tree and splitting the

trunk, only to be forever incorporated into the scar tissue, we grew together. Vandaleur and the android. Be fleet be fleet!

And one afternoon Blenheim called Vandaleur into his study and displayed his notes. "I think I've found it," he said, "but I can't understand it."

Vandaleur's heart leaped.

"Here are the correlations," Blenheim continued. "In fifty papers there are accounts of the criminal android. What is there, outside the depredations, that is also in fifty papers?"

"I don't know, Mr. Blenheim."

"It was a rhetorical question. Here is the answer. The weather."

"What?"

"The weather," Blenheim nodded. "Each crime was committed on a day when the temperature was above ninety degrees Fahrenheit."

"But that's impossible," Vandaleur exclaimed. "It was cool on Lyra Alpha."

"We have no record of any crime committed on Lyra Alpha. There is no paper."

"No. That's right. I—" Vandaleur was confused. Suddenly he exclaimed, "No. You're right. The furnace room. It was hot there. Hot! Of course. My God, yes! That's the answer. Dallas Brady's electric furnace ... The rice deltas on Paragon. So jeet your seat. Yes. But why? Why? My God, why?"

I came into the house at that moment, and passing the study, saw Vandaleur and Blenheim. I entered, awaiting commands, my multiple aptitudes devoted to service.

"That's the android, eh?" Blenheim said after a long moment.

"Yes," Vandaleur answered, still confused by the discovery. "And that explains why it refused to attack you that night on the Strand. It wasn't hot enough to break the prime directive. Only in the heat ... The heat, all reet!" He looked at the android. A lunatic command passed from man to android. I refused. It is forbidden to endanger life. Vandaleur gestured furiously, then seized Blenheim's shoulders and yanked him back out of his desk chair. Blenheim shouted once. Vandaleur leaped on him like a tiger, pinning him to the floor and sealing his mouth with one hand.

"Find a weapon," he called to the android.

"It is forbidden to endanger life."

"This is a fight for self-preservation. Bring me a weapon!" He held the squirming mathematician with all his weight. I went at once to a cupboard where I knew a revolver was kept. I checked it. It was loaded with five cartridges. I handed it to Vandaleur. I took it, rammed the barrel against Blenheim's head and pulled the trigger. He shuddered once.

We had three hours before the cook returned from her day off. We looted the house. We took Blenheim's money and jewels. We packed a bag with clothes. We took Blenheim's notes, destroyed the newspapers; and we left, carefully locking the door behind us. In Blenheim's study we left a pile of crumpled papers under a half

inch of burning candle. And we soaked the rug around it with kerosene. No, I did all that. The android refused. I am forbidden to endanger life or property.

All reet!

They took the tubes to Leicester Square, changed trains and rode to the British Museum. There they got off and went to a small Georgian house just off Russell Square. A shingle in the window read: NAN WEBB, PSYCHOMETRIC CONSULTANT. Vandaleur had made a note of the address some weeks earlier. They went into the house. The android waited in the foyer with the bag. Vandaleur entered Nan Webb's office.

She was a tall woman with grey shingled hair, very fine English complexion and very bad English legs. Her features were blunt, her expression acute. She nodded to Vandaleur, finished a letter, sealed it and looked up.

"My name," I said, "is Vanderbilt. James Vanderbilt."

*On the first hot
day of summer, the android
began singing ...
in a strange, halting voice,
and its accomplished
fingers were behind its back,
writhing in a
strange rhumba all their own.*

"Quite."

"I'm an exchange student at London University."

"Quite."

"I've been researching on the killing android, and I think I've discovered something very interesting. I'd like your advice on it. What is your fee?"

"What is your college at the University?"

"Why?"

"There is a discount for students."

"Merton College."

"That will be two pounds, please."

Vandaleur placed two pounds on the desk and added to the fee Blenheim's notes. "There is a correlation," he said, "between the crimes of the android and the weather. You will note that each crime was committed when the temperature rose above ninety degrees Fahrenheit. Is there a psychometric answer for this?"

Nan Webb nodded, studied the notes for a moment, put down the sheets of paper and said: "Synesthesia, obviously."

"What?"

"Synesthesia," she repeated. "When a sensation, Mr. Vanderbilt, is interpreted immediately in terms of a sensation from a

different sense organ from the one stimulated, it is called synesthesia. For example: A sound stimulus gives rise to a sensation of taste. Or a light stimulus gives rise to a sensation of sound. There can be confusion or short circuiting of any sensation of taste, smell, pain, pressure, temperature and so on. Do you understand?"

"I think so."

"Your research has uncovered the fact that the android most probably reacts to temperature stimulus above the ninety degree level synesthetically. Most probably there is an endocrine response. Probably a temperature linkage with the android adrenal surrogate. High temperature brings about a response of fear, anger, excitement and violent physical activity ... all within the province of the adrenal gland."

"Yes. I see. Then if the android were to be kept in cold climates ..."

"There would be neither stimulus nor response. There would be no crimes. Quite."

"I see. What is projection?"

"How do you mean?"

"Is there any danger of projection with regard to the owner of the android?"

"Very interesting. Projection is a throwing forward. It is the process of throwing out upon another the ideas or impulses that belong to oneself. The paranoid, for example, projects upon others his conflicts and disturbances in order to externalize them. He accuses, directly or by implication, other men of having the very sickness with which he is struggling himself."

"And the danger of projection?"

"It is the danger of believing what is implied. If you live with a psychotic who projects his sickness upon you, there is a danger of falling into his psychotic pattern and becoming virtually psychotic yourself. As, no doubt, is happening to you, Mr. Vandaleur."

Vandaleur leaped to his feet.

"You are an ass," Nan Webb went on crisply. She waved the sheets of notes. "This is no exchange student's writing. It's the unique cursive of the famous Blenheim. Every scholar in England knows his blind writing. There is no Merton College at London University. That was a miserable guess. Merton is one of the Oxford colleges. And you, Mr. Vandaleur, are so obviously infected by association with your deranged android ... by projection, if you will ... that I hesitate between calling the Metropolitan Police and the Hospital for the Criminally Insane."

I took the gun and shot her.

Reet!

"Antares II, Alpha Aurigae, Acrux IV, Pol-lux IX, Rigel Centaurus," Vandaleur said. "They're all cold. Cold as a witch's kiss. Mean temperature of forty degrees Fahrenheit. Never get hotter than seventy. We're in business again. Watch that curve."

The multiple aptitude android swung the wheel with his accomplished hands. The car took the curve sweetly and sped on through the northern marshes, the reeds

stretching for miles, brown and dry, under the cold English sky. The sun was sinking swiftly. Overhead, a lone flight of bustards flapped clumsily eastward. High above the flight, a lone helicopter drifted towards home and warmth.

"No more warmth for us," I said. "No more heat. We're safe when we're cold. We'll hole up in Scotland, make a little money, get across to Norway, build a bankroll and then slip out. We'll settle on Pollux. We're safe. We've licked it. We can live again."

There was a startling *bleep* from overhead, and then a ragged roar: "ATTENTION JAMES VANDALEUR AND ANDROID. ATTENTION JAMES VANDALEUR AND ANDROID!"

Vandaleur started and looked up. The lone helicopter was floating above them. From its belly came amplified commands: "YOU ARE SURROUNDED. THE ROAD IS BLOCKED. YOU ARE TO STOP YOUR CAR AT ONCE AND SUBMIT TO ARREST. STOP AT ONCE!"

I looked at Vandaleur for orders.

"Keep driving," Vandaleur snapped.

The helicopter dropped lower: "ATTENTION ANDROID. YOU ARE IN CONTROL OF THE VEHICLE. YOU ARE TO STOP AT ONCE. THIS IS A STATE DIRECTIVE SUPERSEDING ALL PRIVATE COMMANDS."

"What the hell are you doing?" I shouted.

"A state directive supersedes all private commands," the android answered. "I must point out to you that—"

"Get the hell away from the wheel," Vandaleur ordered. I clubbed the android, yanked him sideways and squirmed over him to the wheel. The car veered off the road in that moment and went churning through the frozen mud and dry reeds. Vandaleur regained control and continued westward through the marshes towards a parallel highway five miles distant.

"We'll beat their God damned block," he grunted.

The car pounded and surged. The helicopter dropped even lower. A searchlight blazed from the belly of the plane.

"ATTENTION JAMES VANDALEUR AND ANDROID. SUBMIT TO ARREST. THIS IS A STATE DIRECTIVE SUPERSEDING ALL PRIVATE COMMANDS."

"He can't submit," Vandaleur shouted wildly. "There's no one to submit to. He can't and I won't."

"Christ!" I muttered. "We'll beat them yet. We'll beat the block. We'll beat the heat. We'll—"

"I must point out to you," I said, "that I am required by my prime directive to obey state directives which supersede all private commands. I must submit to arrest."

"Who says it's a state directive?" Vandaleur said. "Them? Up in that plane? They've got to show credentials. They've got to prove it's state authority before you submit. How d'you know they're not crooks trying to trick us?"

Holding the wheel with one arm, he reached into his side pocket to make sure the gun was still in place. The car skidded. The tires squealed on frost and reeds. The wheel was wrenched from his grasp and

the car yawed up a small hillock and overturned. The motor roared and the wheels screamed. Vandaleur crawled out and dragged the android with him. For the moment we were outside the circle of light boring down from the helicopter. We blundered off into the marsh, into the blackness, into concealment... Vandaleur running with a pounding heart, hauling the android along.

The helicopter circled and soared over the wrecked car, searchlight peering, loudspeaker braying. On the highway we had left, lights appeared as the pursuing and blocking parties gathered and followed radio directions from the plane. Vandaleur and the android continued deeper and deeper into the marsh, working their way towards the parallel road and safety. It was night by now. The sky was a black matte. Not a star showed. The temperature was dropping. A southeast night wind knifed us to the bone.

Far behind there was a dull concussion.

*It danced and
capered in a lunatic rhumba
before the wall
of fire. Its legs twisted.
Its arms waved.
The fingers writhed in a
private rhumba all
their own. It shrieked ...*

Vandaleur turned, gasping. The car's fuel had exploded. A geyser of flame shot up like a lurid fountain. It subsided into a low crater of burning reeds. Whipped by the wind, the distant hem of flame fanned up into a wall, ten feet high. The wall began marching down on us, crackling fiercely. Above it, a pall of oily smoke surged forward. Behind it, Vandaleur could make out the figures of men... a mass of beaters searching the marsh.

"Christ!" I cried and searched desperately for safety. He ran, dragging me with him, until their feet crunched through the surface ice of a pool. He trampled the ice furiously, then flung himself down in the numbing water, pulling the android with us.

The wall of flame approached. I could hear the crackle and feel the heat. He could see the searchers clearly. Vandaleur reached into his side pocket for the gun. The pocket was torn. The gun was gone. He groaned and shook with cold and terror. The light from the marsh fire was blinding. Overhead, the helicopter floated helplessly to one side, unable to fly through the smoke and flames and aid the searchers who were beating far to the right of us.

"They'll miss us," Vandaleur whispered. "Keep quiet. That's an order. They'll miss us. We'll beat the fire. We'll—"

Three distinct shots sounded less than a hundred feet from the fugitives. *Blam! Blam! Blam!* They came from the last three cartridges in my gun as the marsh fire reached it where it had dropped, and exploded the shells. The searchers turned towards the sound and began working directly toward us. Vandaleur cursed hysterically and tried to submerge even deeper to escape the intolerable heat of the fire. The android began to twitch.

The wall of flame surged up to them. Vandaleur took a deep breath and prepared to submerge until the flame passed over them. The android shuddered and burst into an earsplitting scream.

"All reet! All reet!" it shouted. "Be fleet be fleet!"

"Damn you!" I shouted. I tried to drown it.

"Damn you!" I cursed him. I smashed his face.

The android battered Vandaleur, who fought it off until it exploded out of the mud and staggered upright. Before I could return to the attack, the live flames captured it hypnotically. It danced and capered in a lunatic rhumba before the wall of fire. Its legs twisted. Its arms waved. The fingers writhed in a private rhumba of their own. It shrieked and sang and ran in a crooked waltz before the embrace of the heat, a muddy monster silhouetted against the brilliant sparkling flare.

The searchers shouted. There were shots. The android spun around twice and then continued its horrid dance before the face of the flames. There was a rising gust of wind. The fire swept around the capering figure and enveloped it for a roaring moment. Then the fire swept on, leaving behind it a sobbing mass of synthetic flesh oozing scarlet blood that would never coagulate.

The thermometer would have registered 1200° wondrously Fahrenheit.

Vandaleur didn't die. I got away. They missed him while they watched the android caper and die. But I don't know which of us he is these days. Projection, Wanda warned me. Projection, Nan Webb told him. If you live with a crazy man or a crazy machine long enough, I become crazy too. Reet!

But we know one truth. We know they are wrong. The new robot and Vandaleur know that because the new robot's started twitching too. Reet! Here on cold Pollux, the robot is twitching and singing. No heat, but my fingers writhed. No heat, but it's taken the little Talley girl off for a solitary walk. A cheap labor robot. A servo-mechanism... all I could afford... but it's twitching and humming and walking alone with the child somewhere I can't find them. Christ! Vandaleur can't find me before it's too late. Cool and discreet, honey, in the dancing frost while the thermometer registers 10° fondly Fahrenheit.



MY LADY OF THE PSYCHIATRIC SORROWS

BY BRIAN W. ALDISS

Goddard worked with the northern reindeer herds all that long winter. With the other skin-clad men, he followed the migratory pattern of the animals in their search for lichens through snow or shine. He slept by beggarly fires under pines or under the stars. His whole life was encompassed by the sad guilts in reindeer eyes, by clouds of reindeer breath hanging in the crisp air.

The herd consisted of some hundred thousand beasts. They moved in good mild order, with their attendant pest-army of mosquitoes and bloodsucking flies. Their antlers appeared like a moving forest.

For Goddard, it was a Pleistocene way of life. But when spring came he was paid off and began to walk south, back to Scally and the children, with his dog Gripp at his side.

He walked for sixteen days, steadily. The climate grew warmer. The steaks in his pack began to stink, but still he ate them. Every now and then, he came to villages or

mills; always he avoided them.

At last, he was among the vales of the Gray Horse. He walked through sparse forests, where the beech, birch, and hazel bushes were putting forth green leaves. Through the trees, standing by the old highway, was his home. His father was working in the garden. Goddard called to him, and the guard dogs, Chase and Setter, started furious barking.

"How are the children?" Goddard asked his father, embracing the old man. His father was still upright, though the winter months seemed to have shrunk him.

PAINTING BY
ABDUL MATI KLARWEIN

"Come and see. They aren't half growing big!"

"You've made out?"

"Fine, Tom. And I've not heard of a case of plague all winter."

"Good."

"It'll mean that people will be coming back..." As they spoke, they walked together, close, to the rear of the house, where the windmill stood on the rise above their small stream. Gripp kept to Goddard's heel.

The children were there—Derek wading in the stream, June kneeling on the bank. Both were picking reeds. They dropped them and ran with cries of delight into their father's embrace. He rolled on the ground with them, all three of them laughing and crying.

"You don't half smell animal, Dad!"

"I've been an animal..." He was proud of them, both so big and strong, neither older than seven, their eyes clear, their glance candid—as their mother's once had been.

Granddad roasted one of the rotting steaks and they all ate, throwing gristle and bone to the dogs. After, Goddard slept in a downstairs room. He woke once. The sun had gone. His father and the children were in the other room, weaving hurdles from willow sticks by the light of two candles. They called to him affectionately; but when he had urinated outside, he staggered back to his cot and slept again.

In the morning they swarmed over him once more. He kissed and hugged them, and they screamed at his rough lips and beard.

"It's a holiday today. What shall we do?"

"Go and see Mother, of course. Let's feed the animals first."

The goat, the two sows, the chickens, the rabbits, were fed. Leaving the dogs on guard, they all set out along the vale to see Mother. The children snatched up sticks from ditches, leaning heavily on them and saying in their clear voices, "Now we are old children." Their laughter seemed to settle about Goddard's heart.

A stramineous sun broke through the mists. Where the track turned, they saw the bulk of the planetoid ahead, and the children set up a muted cheer.

Goddard said to his father, turning from that shadow-shrouded form, "I don't reckon I could bear life without the kids and all their happiness. I dread when they'll turn into adults and go their way."

"It'll be different then. Don't look ahead." But the old man turned his head away sorrowfully.

"They seem to have a purpose, over and above keeping alive—just like the reindeer."

His father had no answer.

The planetoid was so immense that it blocked the valley. It had created its own ecoclimate. On this side, the northern side, dark hardy bushes had grown at its base,

rock and stone had piled up, and a stream dashed from it. The top of the planetoid's shell showed serrated through thinning cloud.

Derek and June dropped back in awe. June took her father's hand. "Don't it look huge this morning! Tell us how it came here, Dad."

They always liked the drama of the old story. Goddard said, "As the reindeer roam in search of food, men used to roam in search of energy. When the local supplies ran out, they built a mass of little planets, like this one, called zeepees. The zeepees circled about in space, getting energy from the sun. But some of the planetoids got in trouble, just like people. This one—I think it was called Fragrance, or something fancy—it crashed here. Another one went into the sun. Another one drifted off toward the stars."

"Was that years and years ago, Dad?" Derek asked. He took up a stone and flung

*•The planetoid was
so immense that it blocked
the valley. It had
created its own ecoclimate.
Dark hardy bushes had
grown at its base, rock and
stone had piled up,
and a stream dashed from it. •*

it, to show he was not scared.

"Not so long ago. Only, let's see, only six years ago. The zeepee was empty by then. All the people in it had come back to Earth, so nobody was hurt."

"Did Mother go to live there as soon as it crashed?"

"After a bit, yes."

They climbed up a steeply winding path to one side, where the soil had been flung back by the impact. Broom and nettles grew now. The enormous hull was plastic. Its fall through the atmosphere had caused blisters to erupt, so that its sides were warted and striped like a toad.

"I bet it came down with a great big CRASH!" June said.

"It split right open like an egg," her granddad told her.

Goddard led them in through the broken hatch, going cautiously. There had been looting at first. Now all was deserted.

The children fell silent as they walked. The amazing, jumbled maze which had once been a city, a world, was no longer lit, except by daylight filtering in through the ruptured hull. They walked not on floors and

roads but on sides of tunnels and walls of corridors. The stress of impact had caused fractures and crazy distortions of the structure. Defunct lights and signs sprouted underfoot. Doorways had become hatches leading to dry wells. Once-busy intersections produced shafts leading up into nothingness. Dummies stared down at them from overhead tanks which had been shop windows. They tramped across the hitherto inaccessible, where stairways had become abstract bas-reliefs.

"It's cold—I shouldn't like to live here," June said. "Not unless I was a polar bear."

They waded through a riverlet. Cracked and broken, the planetoid lay open to the elements. The rains of autumn, the snows of winter, all blew in among Fragrance's complex structures, turning yesterday's apartments into today's reservoirs. Slowly the water leaked downward through the upturned city, draining at last into native ground. Plants and fungi were getting a grasp on ruined precincts. Small animals had taken over the defunct sewage system. Sparrows and starlings built their nests in what had once been an underground railway, several thousand miles above Earth. After the birds came smaller life forms. Flies and spiders and wasps and beetles and moths. Change worked at everything. What had been impregnable to the rigors of space fell to the ardors of a mild spring.

"Dad, why does Mother want to live here?" Derek asked.

"She liked the old times. She couldn't take to the new."

Goddard never forgot the way to the spot where Scally had settled in. She had indulged her sybaritic tastes and ensconced herself in what had been Fragrance's chief hotel, the Astral. Goddard had found only one way of entering the hotel, which had stood in a block on its own, and that was by way of a metal ladder which an early looter had propped up against a fire exit overhead. Goddard leading, the four of them climbed the ladder and worked their way into the foyer, whose elaborate reception area now projected from one wall. Loose debris had provided the wall on which they stood with a carpet.

Scally had barricaded herself into the old bar. They climbed up a pile of tumbled desks, calling her name through the shattered doors.

He remembered the dirty tomblike smell of her hair. The smell of dead hope, he told himself.

In her first year here, Goddard had come up often from the Vale of the Gray Horse—for sex, for love, or for pity. Scally had not wanted the outside world, and had slowly, almost against her own will, rejected him as a symbol of it. He had helped her make herself comfortable here. So she lived in aspic, in dowdy magnificence, the great cracked mirrors of her ceiling reflecting every torpid move she made.

As her husband and children appeared, she rose from a chair. Instead of coming toward them, she retreated to the far wall. She was tall and soft; the last few indoor years had turned her all gray. As she smiled at them, a long pallid hand crept up to cover her lips.

"Mother, look, Dad's back from the North!" Derek said, running over and clutching her, making her bend over and kiss him and June. "He's been with reindeer."

"You're getting so big and rough," Scally said, letting go of them and backing away, until she could lean against a piano in a self-conscious attitude.

Conscious of his coarse skins, Goddard went over and took her in his arms. She was thinner and drier than previously, while all around her compartments bulged with the rich damps of decay. Her expression as she searched his face wounded him.

"It's spring again, Scally," he said. "Come out with us. Come home. We'll fix the roof, Dad and I, and get one of the upstairs rooms done specially for you."

"This is my place," she said.

"The children need you." But the children had lost interest in their mother, and were questing about the room and adjacent corridors. They had found two rods to walk with; June was laughing and calling, "Now we're a couple of old children again!"

"I'm a hundred years old."

"I'm a thousand, and sixty hundred years old."

"I'm even older than Mum."

Goddard's father was embarrassed. He looked about and eventually left the room too, to follow the children.

"He hates me!" Scally said, pointing at the closing door.

"No, he doesn't. He just doesn't have anything to say. He hates this prison."

"He thinks I should come back and look after you and the children."

"Why don't you? We need you. You could take some of this furniture."

"Huh! I'd only be a liability to you."

"Scally, you're my wife. I'd gladly have you back. This place is no good. Why do you stay here?"

She looked away, waved a hand in dismissal. "You ask such fool questions."

Angry, he grasped her wrist. "Come on, then, we take the trouble to come and see you! Tell me why you want to live in this muddy ruin, come on—tell me!"

Through the dim upturned light, a glow crept into her features. "Because I can't take reality the way you can! You're so stupidly insensitive, you don't mind the beastly pig-reality of the present. But some of us live by myth, by legend. Just as the children do, until you turn them out of it and make them grow up before their time."

He said sullenly, "You only came here because you thought you'd be a bit more comfortable. It's nothing to do with myth."

"While I'm here, I'm in the remains of an age when men lived by their myths, when

they created machines and looked outward, when they didn't wallow in every muddy season and grovel on the ground as you do! This room once sailed among the stars—and all you can imagine is that I'm after comfort."

She laughed bitterly.

Goddard scratched his head. "I know it's kind of uncomfortable back at home. But honest, if you can face up to it, life's better than it used to be in the old days. It's more real. Less of all that waffle, all those things we didn't really need."

She folded her arms, no longer looking as faded as she had five minutes earlier. "You were born to be a farmer, Tom, to walk behind cattle and reindeer, tramping through their droppings. Of course you rejoice at the death of the consumer society. But that wasn't all we had, was it? Remember the other things the Catastrophe killed off? The hope that we were moving toward a better world, the feeling that man-

●He shook his head.
"All that old world is dead
and gone, my dear.
Books are where you get your
sick notions from.
Throw it away and come into
the light of day.
The plague is gone . . . ●"

kind might come to some sort of ethical maturity as he left his home planet? I resent being kicked back into the Dark Ages, if you don't."

He did not know what to say. He shook his head. "Resentment's no way to shape your life."

"There is no shape to life, Tom. Not any more. Style died along with everything else. Why, when I look at you . . ." She turned away. "To think you were a top sports-clothes designer! In six years you've become nothing but a peasant."

The children were screaming with feigned terror in one of the upside-down corridors.

"I'll try and make you comfortable if you come home," Goddard said. She could always confuse him. Half aware that he was only infuriating her, he put out a hand pleadingly, but she turned away toward the table and chair at which she had been sitting when they entered.

"At least I can read here, at least my mind is free." She had picked a book up from the table.

He shook his head. "All that old world is dead and gone, my dear. Books are where

you get your sick notions from. Throw it away and come into the light of day. The plague has gone and things'll be better."

The children were screaming with delight outside.

"Today or yesterday, I was reading about the scientific basis for the legend of the Golden Fleece," Scally told Goddard. "Did you ever hear of the Greek legend of the Golden Fleece, and how Jason and the Argonauts went in search of it? The story has always related to the Black Sea area. When this book was published, researchers had analyzed pieces of cloth from the tomb of an old king of that area, Tumulus I, who lived in the Fifth Century, B.C. That was the period of Jason and his crew. Do you know what the researchers found?"

He tried to escape from the conversation, but she went on remorselessly, although the children had come back hooting into the room.

"They found that the cloth from the tomb was composed of extremely fine fibers, with mean diameters of—I forget the exact measurements—about sixteen micrometers, I believe. That is the earliest appearance of true fine-wooled sheep by several centuries. So you see that all that golden legend was generated by Jason and his friends going in search of more comfortable underwear." She laughed.

The children had tied sticks around their heads with old fabric.

"Look, Dad, Mother! We're reindeer. We've gone wild! We're going to head north and we'll never let anyone milk us again!"

Puzzled by her story, Goddard said to her over the racket, "I don't understand you properly. Whatever happened to those Argonauts can't affect us, can it?"

She looked at him wearily, with her eyelids lowered. "Take these young reindeer away," she said. "One day soon their myths will break down. Don't you see, there's a prosaic reality to every legend, but people like you beat legends into prosaic reality."

"I never beat you!"

"Have you got remarkably thick in the head, or is that meant to be funny?"

"You're sick, Scally, really you are. Come away and let me look after you!"

"Never say that again! You oaf, if you didn't believe that I was sick, can't you see that I might come with you willingly?"

Goddard scratched his head. "Since you can always get the better of me in words, I can't think why you're afraid to come with me." Then he turned away.

The next day was mild and springlike. Goddard stripped to the waist and began to plant row after row of seed potatoes, which his father had carefully cherished throughout the winter. The two children played on the other side of the stream, building little planetoids in every bush, and pretending that Gripp was a monster from outer space.

OMNI
ENCORE
PART
TWO

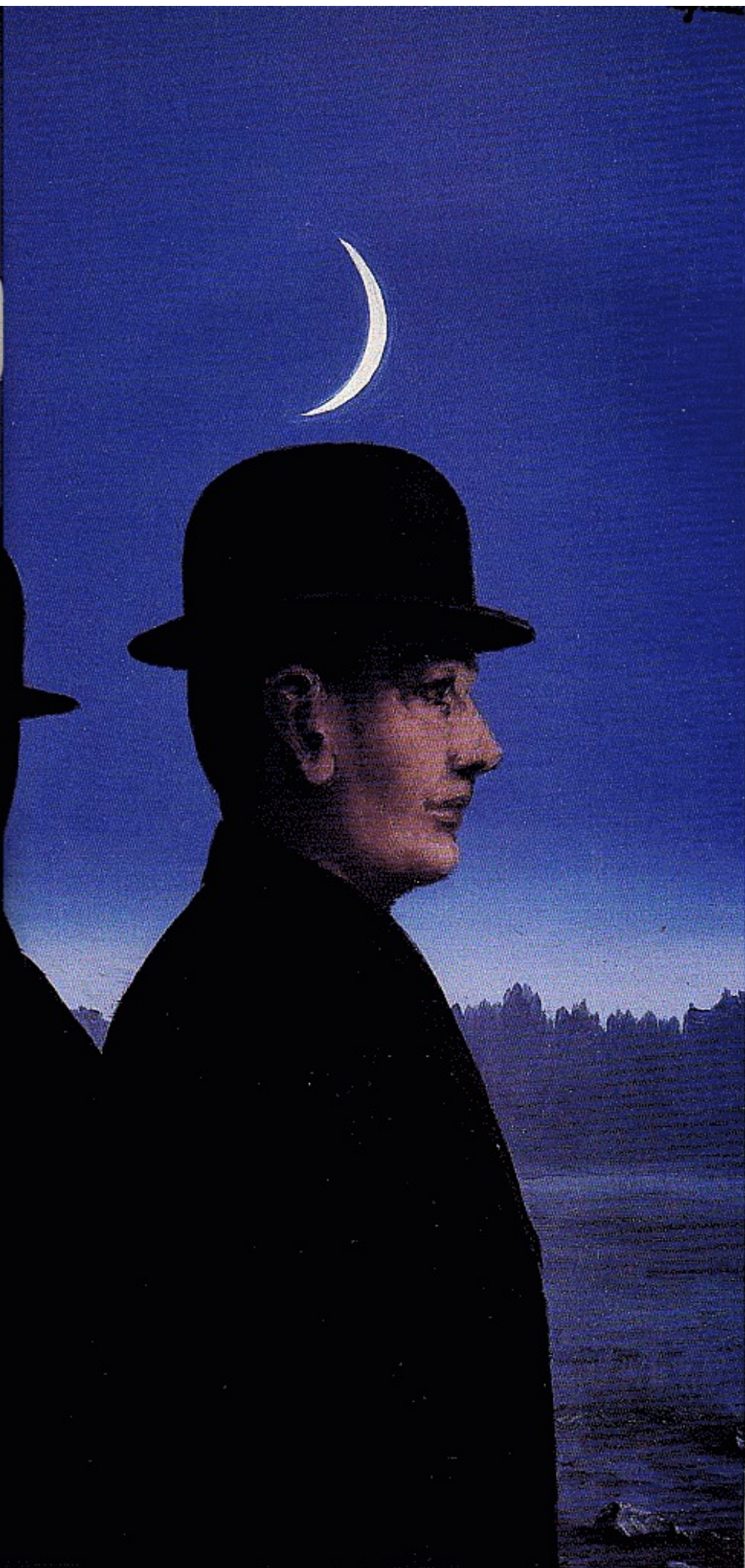
Love. Hate. Jealousy. Fear. Familiar themes, yes, but endlessly fascinating and treated here with striking originality. For example, in John Keefauver's eerie tale, "Giant on the Beach," a smug bigot has unknowingly predicted the weird circumstances that lead to his own ghastly death. The prophecy lurks in one of his oft-repeated racial slurs.

The undying love of a widow for her late husband motivates the plot in Spider Robinson's "Soul Search." Exceedingly wealthy and fanatic in her unholy purpose, she enlists the aid of a trusted employee and some super technology to reincarnate her dearly departed in his cryogenically preserved body. The prospect of murdering certain innocent children in the process doesn't stop her. What does defeat her is the trusted employee's fervid love for her. In fact it kills her. Robinson achieves a neat stroke of irony in his denouement, a literary pun, really, on the maxim that love conquers all.

In "The President's Image" Stephen Robinett reveals that, since the 1992 election, things at the White House have been run by a computer-controlled holographic image of the President of the United States. Due to his dread of being assassinated, the flesh-and-blood President has been hiding out in Tahiti. But the holograph has done such a fine job at the nation's helm that it is a shoo-in for reelection in the forthcoming 1996 campaign. A crisis arises when the holograph chooses not to run and its corporeal counterpart in the South Seas must face up to his fears.

Whereas Robinett has written gentle satire, John Morressy has resorted to uproarious lampoonery in his story, "The Last Jerry Fagin Show." His plump target is the television industry in general and TV talk-shows in particular. Morressy's amusing tale is about a disarmingly naive extraterrestrial who learns to its delight that indeed there is no business on earth like show-business.





*Just as Harold began
his new life,
the stranger appeared*

OUT OF LUCK

BY WALTER TEVIS

It was only three months after he had left his wife and children and moved in with Janet that Janet decided she had to go to Washington for a week. Harold was devastated. He tried not to let her see it. The fiction between them was that he had left Gwen so he could grow up, change his life, and learn to paint again. But all he was certain of was that he had left Gwen to have Janet as his mistress. There were other reasons: his recovery from alcoholism, the years he had wasted his talent as an art professor, and Gwen's refusal to move to New York with him. But none of these would have been sufficient to uproot him and cause him to take a year's leave from his job if Janet had not worn peach-colored bikini panties that stretched tightly across her lovely bottom.

He spent the morning after she left cleaning up the kitchen and washing the big pot with burnt zucchini in it. Janet had made him three quarts of zucchini soup before leaving on the shuttle, along with two jars of chutney, veal stew in a blue casserole dish, and two loaves of Irish soda bread. It

"Mysteries of the Horizon" painting by René Magritte © by A.D.A.G.P. Paris, 1982

PAINTING BY RENE MAGRITTE

was very international. The mess in the tiny kitchen of her apartment look him two hours to clean up. Then he cooked himself a breakfast of scrambled eggs and last night's mashed potatoes, fried with onions. He drank two cups of coffee from Janet's Chemex. Drinking the coffee, he walked several times into the living room, where his easel stood, and looked at the quarter-done painting. Each time he looked at it his heart sank. He did not want to finish the painting—not *that* painting, that dumb, academic abstraction. But there was no other painting for him to paint right now. What he wanted was Janet.

Janet was a very successful folk-art dealer. They had met at a museum party. She was in Washington now as a consultant to the National Gallery. She had said to him, "No, I don't think you should come to Washington with me. We need to be apart from each other for a while. I'm beginning to feel suffocated." He had nodded sagely while his heart sank.

One problem was that he distrusted folk art and Janet's interest in it, the way he distrusted Janet's fondness for her cats. Janet talked to her cats a lot. He was neutral about cats themselves, but he felt people who talked to them were trivial. And being interested in badly painted nineteenth-century portraits also seemed trivial to him now.

He looked at the two gold-framed American primitives above Janet's sofa, said, "Horseshit!" and drew back his mug in a fantasy of throwing coffee on them both.

Across from the apartment on Sixty-third Street workmen were renovating an old mansion; they had been at it three months before, when Harold moved in. He watched them for a minute now, mixing cement in a wheelbarrow and bringing sacks of it from a truck at the corner of Madison Avenue. Three workmen in white undershirts held sunlit discourse on the plywood ramp that had replaced the building's front steps. Behind windows devoid of glass he could see men moving back and forth. But nothing happened; nothing seemed to change in the building. It was the same mess it had been before, like his own spiritual growth: lots of noise and movement and no change.

He looked at his watch, relieved. It was ten-thirty. The morning was half over, and he needed to go to the bank. He put on a light jacket and left.

As he was waiting in a crowd at the Third Avenue light, he heard a voice shout, "Taxi!" and a man pushed roughly past him, right arm high and waving, onto the avenue. The man was about thirty, in faded blue jeans and a sleeveless sweater. A taxi squealed to a stop at the corner, and the man conferred with the driver for a moment before getting in. He seemed to be quietly arrogant, preoccupied with something. Harold could have kicked him in the ass. He did not like the man's look of confidence. He did not like his sandy, uncombed hair. The light changed, and the cab took off fast, up Third Avenue.

Harold crossed and went into the bank. He went to a table, quickly wrote out a "Cash" check for a hundred, then walked over toward the line. Halfway across the lobby, he stopped cold. The man in the sleeveless sweater was standing in line, holding a checkbook. His lips were pursed in silent whistling. He was wearing the same faded blue jeans and—Harold now noticed—Adidas.

He was looking idly in Harold's direction. Harold averted his eyes. There were at least ten other people waiting behind the man. He had to have been here awhile. An identical twin? A mild hallucination, making two similar people look exactly alike? Harold got in line. After a while the man finished his business and left. Harold cashed his check and left, stuffing five twenties into his billfold. Another drain on the seven thousand he had left Michigan with. He had seven thousand to live on for a year in New York, with Janet, while he learned to paint again, to be the self-

● He glanced down Park Avenue while crossing it and saw a sleeveless sweater and faded jeans, from the back, disappearing into one of the tall apartment buildings. He shuddered. ●

supporting artist his whiskey dreams had been filled with. Whiskey had left him unable to answer the telephone or open the door. That had been two years ago in Michigan. Whiskey had left him sitting behind closed suburban blinds at two in the afternoon, reading the J. C. Penney catalog and waiting for Gwen to come home from work. Well, he had been free of whiskey for a year and a half now. First the hospital, then A.A., now New York and Janet.

He walked back toward her apartment, thinking of how his entire bankroll of seven thousand could not pay Janet's rent for three months. And she had taken this big New York place after two years of living in an even larger apartment in Paris. On a marble-topped lingerie chest in one of the bathrooms was a snapshot of her, astride a gleaming Honda, on the Boulevard des Capucines by the ironwork doorway of that apartment. When that photograph was taken, Harold was living in a ranch house in Michigan and was driving a Chevrolet.

He glanced down Park Avenue while crossing it and saw a sleeveless sweater and faded jeans, from the back, disappearing into one of the tall apartment buildings.

He shuddered and quickened his pace. He shifted his billfold from a rear to a front pocket, picturing those pickpockets who bump you from behind and rob you while apologizing on the streets of New York. His mother—his very protective mother—had told him about that twenty years before. Part of him loved New York, loved its action and its anonymity, along with the food and clothes and bookstores. Another part of him feared it. The sight of triple locks on apartment doors tended to frighten him, or of surly Puerto Ricans with well-muscled arms, carrying their big, noisy, arrogant radios. Their Kill-the-Anglo radios. The slim-hipped black men frightened him, with long, tight-assed trousers in pale colors, half-covering expensive shoes—Italian killer shoes. And there were drunks everywhere. In doorways. Poking studiously through garbage bins for the odd half-eaten pizza slice, the usable worn shirt. Possibly for emeralds and diamonds. Part of him wanted to scrub up a drunk or two, with a Brillo pad, like the zucchini pot. Something satisfying in that.

The man in the sweater had been white, clean, nonmenacing. Possibly European. Yet Harold, crossing Madison now, felt chilled by the thought of him. Under the chill was anger. That spoiled, arrogant face! That sandy hair! He hurried back to Janet's apartment building, walked briskly up the stairs to the third floor, let himself in. There in the living room stood the painting. He suddenly saw that it could use a sort of rectangle of pale green, like a distant field of grass, right there. He picked up a brush, very happy to do so. Outside the window the sun was shining brightly. The workmen on the building across the street were busy. Harold was busy.

He worked for three solid hours and felt wonderful. It was good work, too, and the painting was coming along. At last.

For lunch he made himself a bacon-and-tomato sandwich on toast. It was simple midwestern fare, and he loved it.

When he had finished eating, he went back into the living room, sat in the black director's chair in front of the window, and looked at the painting by afternoon light. It looked good—just a tad spooky, the way he wanted it to be. It would be a good painting after all. It was really working. He decided to go see a movie.

The movie he wanted to see was called *Out of Luck*. It was a comedy from France, advertised as "a hilarious sex farce," with subtitles. It sounded fine for a sunny fall afternoon. He walked down Madison toward the theater.

There were an awful lot of youthful, well-dressed people on Madison Avenue. They all probably spoke French. He looked in the windows of places with names like Le Relais, La Bagagerie, Le Bijou. He would have given ten dollars to see a J. C. Penney's or a plain barber shop with a red-and-white barber's pole.

As he was crossing Park Avenue, traffic snarled as usual, there was suddenly the

loud harrumphing of a pair of outrageously noisy motorcycles, and with a rush of hot air two black Hondas zoomed past him. From the back the riders appeared to be a man and a woman, although the sexual difference was hard to detect. Each wore a spherical helmet that reflected the sun; the man's helmet was red; the other, green. Science-fiction helmets, they hurt the eyes with reflected and dazzling sunlight. There was a smell of exhaust. Each of the riders, man and woman, was wearing a brown sleeveless sweater and blue jeans. Each wore Adidas over white socks. Their shirts were short-sleeved, blue. So had been the shirts of the man in the taxi and the man in line at Chemical Bank. Harold's stomach twisted. He wanted to scream.

The cyclists disappeared in traffic, darting into it with insouciance, tilting their black bikes first this way and then that, as though merely leaning their way through the congestion of taxis and limousines and sanitation trucks.

Maybe it was a fad in dress. Maybe coincidence. He had never noticed before how many people wore brown sleeveless sweaters. Who counted such things? And everyone wore jeans. He was wearing jeans himself.

The movie was at Fifty-seventh and Third. There was only a scattering of people in the theater, since it was the middle of the afternoon. The story was about a woman who was haunted by the gravelly voice of her dead lover—a younger man who had been killed in a motorcycle accident. She was a gorgeous woman and went through a sequence of affairs, breaking up with each new lover after the voice of her old, dead one pointed out their flaws to her, or distracted her while making love. It really was funny. Sometimes, though, it made Harold edgy when he thought of the young lover Janet had had before him, who had disappeared from her life in some way Harold did not know about. But several times he laughed loudly.

And then, toward the end of the movie, her lover reappeared, apparently not dead at all. It was on a quiet Paris street. She was out walking with an older man she had just slept with, going to buy some coffee, when a black Honda pulled up to the curb beside her. She stopped. The driver pulled off his helmet. Harold's heart almost stopped beating, and he stared crazily. There in front of him, on the Cinemascope movie screen, was the huge image of a youngish man with sandy hair, a brown sleeveless sweater, blue shirt, Adidas. The man smiled at the woman. She collapsed in a dead faint.

When the man on the motorcycle spoke, his voice was as it had been when it was haunting her: gravelly and bland. Harold wanted to throw something at the screen, wanted to scream at the image, "Get out of here, you arrogant fucker!" But he did nothing and said nothing. He stayed in his seat, waiting for the movie to end. It ended with the woman getting on the dead lover's

motorcycle and riding off with him. He wouldn't tell her where he lived now. He was going to show her.

Harold watched the credits closely, wanting to find the actor who had played the old lover. His name in the film had been Paul. But no actor was listed for the name of Paul. The others were there, but not Paul. *What in God's name is happening?* Harold thought. He left the theater and, hardly daring to look around himself on the bright street, flagged down a cab and went home. Could a person hallucinate a character into a movie? Was the man at the bank in fact a French movie actor? Twelve years of drinking could mess up your brain chemistry. But he hadn't even had the D.T.'s. His New York psychiatrist had told him he tended to get badly regressed at times, but his sanity had never been in question.

In the apartment he was somehow able, astonishingly, to get back into the painting for a few hours. He made a few changes, making it spookier. He felt spookier now.

*Sometimes, though,
it made Harold edgy when
he thought of the
young lover Janet had had
before him, who
had disappeared from her
life in some way
Harold did not know about.*

and it came out onto the canvas. The painting was nearly done. When he stopped, it was just eight o'clock in the evening. The workmen across the street had finished their day, hours before, had packed up their tools, and had gone home to Queens or wherever. The building, as always, was unchanged; its doorways and windows gaped blankly. There was a pile of rubble by the plywood entry platform where there had always been a pile of rubble.

He went into the kitchen, ignored the veal stew Janet had made for him, and lit the oven. Then he took a Hungry Man chicken pie out of the freezer, ripped off the cardboard box, stabbed the frozen top crust a few times with her Sabatier, slipped it into the oven, and set the timer for forty-five minutes.

He went back into the living room, looked again at the painting. "Maybe I needed the shit scared out of me," he said aloud. But the thought of the man in the sweater chilled him. Harold went over to the hutch in the corner, opened its left door, and flipped on the little Sony TV inside. Then he walked across the big room to the dry sink and began rummaging for candy. He kept

candy in various places.

He found a couple of pieces of butterscotch and began sucking on one of them. Back in the kitchen he opened the oven door a moment, enjoying the feel of hot air. His little Hungry Man pie sat inside, waiting for him.

There had been a man's voice on television for a minute or so, reciting some kind of disaster news. A California brush fire or something. There in the kitchen Harold began to realize that the voice was familiar, gravelly. It had a slight French accent. He rushed into the living room, still holding a potholder. On the TV screen was the man in the brown sweater, saying, "... from Pasadena, California, for NC News." Then John Chancellor came on.

Harold threw the potholder at the TV screen. "You son of a bitch!" he shouted. "You ubiquitous son of a bitch!" Then he sank into the director's chair, on the edge of tears. His eyes burned.

When his pie was ready, he ate it as if it were cardboard, forcing himself to eat every bite. To keep his strength up, as his mother would have said, for the oncoming storm. For the oncoming storm.

He kept the TV off that evening and did not go out. He finished the painting by artificial light at three in the morning, took two Somnux tablets, and went to bed, frightened. He had wanted to call Janet but hadn't. That would have been chicken. He slept without dreaming for nine hours.

It was noon when he got up from the big platform bed and stumbled into the kitchen for breakfast. He drank a cup of cold zucchini while waiting for the coffee from yesterday to heat up. He felt okay, ready for the man in the sweater whenever he might strike. The coffee boiled over, splattering the white wall with brown tears. He reached to pull the big Chemex off the burner and scalded himself. "Shit!" he said and held his burned hand under cold tapwater for half a minute.

He walked into the living room and began looking at the painting in daylight. It was really very good. Just the right feeling, the right arrangement. Scary, too. He took it from the easel, set it against a wall. Then he thought better of that. The cats might get at it. He hadn't seen the cats for a while. He looked around him. No cats. He put the painting on top of the dry sink, out of harm's way. He would put out some cat food.

From outside came the sound of a motorcycle. Or of two motorcycles. He turned, looked out the window. There was dust where the motorcycles had just been, a light cloud of it settling. On the plywood platform at the entryway to the building being renovated stood two people in brown sleeveless sweaters, blue shirts, jeans. One was holding a clipboard, and they were talking. He could not hear their voices, even though the window was open. He walked slowly to the window, placed his hands on the ledge, stared down at them. He stared at the same sandy hair, the same

face. Two schoolgirls in plaid skirts walked by, on their way to lunch. Behind them was a woman in a brown sleeveless sweater and blue jeans, with sandy hair. She had the same face as the man, only slightly feminine in the way the head set on the shoulders. And she walked like a woman. She walked by the two men, her twins, ignoring them.

Harold looked at his watch. Twelve-fifteen. His heart was pounding painfully. He went to the telephone and called his psychiatrist. It was lunch hour, and he might be able to reach him.

He did—for just a minute or two. Quickly he told him that he was beginning to see the same person everywhere. Even on TV and in the movies. Sometimes two or three at a time.

"What do you think, Harold?" he said to the doctor. The psychiatrist's name also was Harold.

"It would have to be a hallucination, wouldn't it? Or maybe coincidence."

"It's not coincidence. There've been seven of them, and they are identical, Doctor. *Identical*." His voice, he realized, was not hysterical. It might become that way, he thought, if the doctor should say, "Interesting," as they do in the movies.

"I'm sorry that you have a hallucination," Harold the psychiatrist said. "I wish I could see you this afternoon, but I can't. In fact, I have to go now. I have a patient."

"Harold!" Harold said. "I've had a dozen sessions with you. Am I the type who hallucinates?"

"No, you aren't, Harold," the psychiatrist said. "You really don't seem to me to be like that at all. It's puzzling. Just don't drink."

"I won't, Harold," he said, and hung up.

What to do? he thought. *I can stay inside until Janet comes back. I don't have to go out for anything. Maybe it will stop on its own.*

And then he thought, *But so what? They can't hurt me. What if I see a whole bunch of them today? So what? I can ignore them.* He would get dressed and go out. What the hell. Confront the thing.

When he got outdoors, the two of them were gone from in front of the building. He looked to his right, over toward Madison. One of them was just crossing the street, walking lightly on the Adidas. There were ordinary men and women around him. Hell, he was ordinary enough. There were just too many of him. Like a clone. Two more crossed, a man and a woman. They were holding hands. Harold decided to walk over to Fifth Avenue.

Just before the corner of Fifth there was a wastebasket with a bum poking around in it. Harold had seen this bum before, had even given him a quarter once. Fellow alcoholic. There but for the grace of God, et cetera. He fished a quarter from his pocket and gave it to the bum. "Say," Harold said, on a wild impulse, "have you noticed something funny? People in brown sweaters and jeans?" He felt foolish asking. The bum was fragrant in the afternoon sun.

"Hell, yes, buddy," the bum said. "Kind of light brown hair? And tennis shoes? Hell, yes, they're all over the place." He shook his head dazedly. "Can't get no money out of 'em. Tried 'em six, eight times. You got another one of those quarters?"

Harold gave him a dollar. "Get yourself a drink," he said.

The bum widened his eyes and took the money silently. He turned to go.

"Hey!" Harold said, calling him back. "Have a drink for me, will you? I don't drink, myself." He held out another dollar.

"That's the ticket," the bum said, carefully, as if addressing a madman. He took the bill quickly, then turned toward Fifth Avenue. "Hey," he said, "there's one of 'em," and pointed. The man in the brown sleeveless sweater went by, jogging slowly on his Adidas. The bum jammed his two dollars into a pocket and moved on.

Well, the bum had been right. Don't let them interfere with business. But it wasn't hallucination—not unless he had halluci-

Most of the foot traffic was moving toward him and every third or fourth one of them was the person in the brown sweater and blue shirt. It was like an invasion from Mars.

nated the bum and the conversation along with the bum. He checked his billfold and found the two dollars were indeed gone. Where would they have gone if he had made up the bum in his unconscious? He hadn't eaten them. If he had, the game was over anyway and he was really in a strait-jacket somewhere, being fed intravenously, while somebody took notes. Well.

He turned at Fifth Avenue, toward the spire of the Empire State Building, and stopped cold. Most of the foot traffic on the avenue was moving uptown toward him, and every third or fourth one of them was the person in the brown sweater and the blue short-sleeved shirt. It was like an invasion from Mars. And he saw that some of the normal people—the people like himself—were staring at them from time to time. The brown-sweatered person was always calm, whistling softly sometimes, cool. The others looked flustered. Harold jammed his hands into his pockets. He felt suddenly cold. He began walking down Fifth Avenue.

He kept going for a few blocks, then on an impulse ran across the street to the Central Park side and climbed up on a park

bench that faced the avenue and then from the bench onto the stone railing near the Sixtieth Street subway station. He looked downtown, up high now so that he could see. And the farther downtown he looked, the more he saw of an array of brown sweaters, light brown in the afternoon sunlight, with pale, sandy-haired heads above them. On a crazy impulse he looked down at his own clothes and was relieved to see that he was not himself wearing a brown sleeveless sweater and that his jeans were not the pale and faded kind that the person—that the multitude—was wearing.

He got down from the bench and headed across Grand Army Plaza, past people who were now about one half sandy-haired and sweated and the other half just random people. He realized that the repeated person hadn't seemed to crowd the city any more than usual. They weren't new, then. If anything, they were replacing the others.

Abruptly he decided to go into the Plaza Hotel. There were two of them in the lobby, talking quietly with each other, in French. He walked past them toward the Oak Bar; he would get a Perrier in there.

In the bar, there were three of them sitting at the bar itself and two of them were at a table near the front. He seated himself at the bar. A man in a brown sweater turned from where he was washing glasses, wiped his hands on his jeans, came over, and said, "Yes, sir?" The voice was gravelly, with a slight French accent, and the face was blank.

"Perrier with lime," Harold said. When the man brought it, Harold said, "How long have you been tending bar here?"

"About twenty minutes," the man said and smiled.

"Where were you before?"

"Oh, here and there," the man said. "You know how it is."

Harold stared at him, feeling his own face getting red. "No, I don't know how it is!" he said, in frustration.

The man started to whistle softly. He turned away.

Harold leaned over the bar and took him by the shoulder. The sweater was soft—probably cashmere. "Where do you come from? What are you doing?"

The man smiled coldly at him. "I come from the street. I'm tending bar here." He stood completely still, waiting for Harold to let go of him.

"Why are there so many of you?"

"There's only one of me," the man said.

"Only one?"

"Just one." He waited a moment. "I have to wait on that couple." He nodded his head slightly toward the end of the bar. A couple of them had come in, a male and a female as far as Harold could see in the somewhat dim light.

Harold let go of the man, got up, and went to a pay telephone on the wall. He dialed his psychiatrist. The phone rang twice, and then a male voice said, "Doctor Morse is not in this afternoon. May I take a

message?" The voice was the gravelly voice. Harold hung up. He spun around and faced the bar. The man had just returned from serving drinks to the identical couple at the far end. "What in hell is your name?" he said wildly.

The man smiled. "That's for me to know and you to find out," he said.

Harold began to cry. "What's your god-damned name?" he said, sobbing. "My name's Harold. For Christ's sake, what's yours?"

Now that he was crying, the man looked sympathetic. He turned for a moment to the mirrored shelves behind him, took two unopened bottles of whiskey, and then set them on the bar in front of Harold. "Why don't you just take these, Harold?" he said pleasantly. "Take them home with you. It's only a few blocks from here."

"I'm an alcoholic," Harold replied, shocked.

"Who cares?" the man said. He got a bright-orange shopping bag from somewhere under the bar and put the bottles in it. "On the house," he said.

Harold stared at him. "What is your god-damned, fucking name?"

"For me to know," the man said softly. "For you to find out."

Harold took the shopping bag, pushed open the door, and went into the lobby. There was no doorman at the big doorway of the hotel, but the man in the sleeveless sweater stood there like a doorman. "Have a good day now, Harold," the man said as Harold went on his way.

Now there was no one else on the street but the man. Everywhere. And now they all looked at him in recognition, since he had given his name. Their smiles were cool, distant, patronizing. Some nodded at him slightly as he made his way slowly up the avenue toward Sixty-third; some ignored him. Several passed on motorcycles, wearing red helmets. A few waved coolly to him. One slowed his motorcycle down near the curb and said, "Hi, Harold," and then sped off. Harold closed his eyes.

He got home all right, and up the stairs. When he walked into the living room, he saw that the cats had knocked his new painting to the floor and had badly smeared a corner of it. Apparently one of them had rolled on it. The cats were nowhere in sight. He had not seen them since Janet had gone.

He did not care about the painting now. Not really. He knew what he was going to do. He could see in his mind the French movie, the man on the motorcycle.

In the closet where she kept her vacuum cleaner, Janet also kept a motorcycle helmet. A red one, way up on the top shelf, behind some boxes of candles and light bulbs. She had never spoken to him before about motorcycles; he had never asked her about the helmet. He hadn't thought about it since he first noticed it when he was unpacking months before and looking for a place to put his Samsonite suitcase.

He set the bag of bottles on the ledge by

the window overlooking the building where men in brown sleeveless sweaters were now working. He opened one bottle with a practiced fingernail, steadily. The cork came out with a pop. He took a glass from the sideboard and poured it half full of whiskey. For a moment he stood there motionless, looking down at the building. The work, he saw without surprise, was getting done. There was glass in the window frames now; there had been none that morning. The plywood ramp had been replaced with marble steps. Abruptly he turned and called, "Kitty! Kitty!" toward the bedroom. There was silence. "Kitty! Kitty!" he called again. No cat appeared.

In the kitchen there was a red-legged stool by the telephone. Carrying his untasted glass of whiskey in one hand, he picked up the stool with the other and headed toward the closet at the back of the apartment. He set the whiskey on a shelf, set the stool in the closet doorway. He climbed up carefully. There was the motor-

Now there was
no one on the street but
the man. Everywhere.
And now they all looked at
him in recognition,
since he had given his name.
Their smiles were
cool, distant, patronizing.

cycle helmet, red, with a layer of dust on top. He pulled it down. There was something inside it. He reached in, still standing on the stool, and pulled out a brown sleeveless sweater. There were stains on the sweater. They looked like bloodstains. He looked inside the helmet. There were stains there, too. And there was a little blue band with letters on it. It read PAUL BENDEL—PARIS. Once, in bed, Janet had called him Paul. Oh, you son of a bitch! he said.

Getting down from the stool, he thought, For him to know. For me to find out. He stopped only to pick up the drink and take it to the bathroom, where he poured it down the toilet. Then he went into the living room and looked out the window. The light was dimming; there was no one on Sixty-third Street. He pushed the window higher, leaned out. Looking to his right, he could see the intersection with Madison. He saw several of them crossing it. One looked his way and waved. He did not wave back. What he did was take the two bottles and drop them down to the street, where they shattered. He thought of a man's body, shattering, in a motorcycle wreck. In France? Certainly in France.

A group of four of them had turned the corner at Madison and were walking toward him. All of them had their hands in their pockets. Their heads were all inclined together, and they appeared to be having an intimate conversation. *Why whisper?* Harold thought. *I can't hear you anyway.*

He pulled himself up and sat on the window ledge, letting his legs hang over. He stared down at them and forced himself to say aloud, "Paul." They were directly below him now, huddled and whispering. They seemed not to have heard him.

He took a deep breath and said it louder, "Paul." And then he found somewhere the strength to shout it, in a loud, clear, steady voice. "Paul," he shouted, "Paul Bendel."

Then the four faces looked up, shocked. "You're Paul Bendel," he said. "Go back to your grave in France, Paul."

They stood transfixed. Harold looked over toward Madison. Two of them there had stopped in their tracks in the middle of the intersection.

The four faces below were now staring up at him in mute appeal, begging for silence. His voice spoke to this appeal with strength and clarity. "Paul Bendel," he said, "you must go back to France."

Abruptly all four of them averted their eyes from his and from one another's. Their bodies seemed to become slack. Then they began drifting apart, walking dispiritedly away from one another and from him.

The cats appeared sleepily from an open closet, waiting to be fed. He fed them.

He was redoing a smeared place on the painting when the telephone rang. It was Janet. She was clearly in a good mood, and she asked whether the zucchini soup had been all right.

"Fine," he said. "I had it cold."

She laughed. "I'm glad it wasn't too burned. How was the *jarret de veau*?"

Immediately, at the French, his stomach tightened. Despite the present clarity of his mind, he felt the familiar pain of the old petulance and jealousy. For a moment he hugged the pain to himself, then dismissed it with a sigh.

"It's in the oven right now," he said. "I'm having it for dinner."

Walter Tevis began writing at age 13. Today he is a successful author who has created much SF and non-SF literature. His two best-known novels—*The Hustler* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*—have been made into movies. The screen rights to a third novel, *Mockingbird*, are currently being negotiated in Hollywood. A former Professor of English at Ohio University, Tevis makes it a policy to apportion his creative output equally to science fiction and other subjects, just as long as it illuminates the human condition. His science fiction gains a special quality from being less involved with futuristic technology or far-out phenomena than with people's lives. His latest SF novel, *The Steps of the Sun*, is scheduled for fall publication.





Col... I heard; the word had probably been said more than once, but I did not immediately realize that it was spoken to me. I started to turn around; but the chair, quicker than I, did this for me. Standing in front of me was a girl, perhaps twenty years old, in blue; it clung to her like a liquid congealed; her arms and breasts were hidden in a navy blue fluff that became more and more transparent as it descended. Her slim, lovely belly was like a sculpture in breathing metal. Large shiny objects covered her ears. A small mouth in an uncertain smile, the lips painted, the nostrils also red in-

RETURN FROM THE STARS

BY STANISLAW LEM

*Things had changed — especially
the war between the sexes*

PAINTING BY INGO SWANN

side—I had noticed that this was how most of the women here on Earth were made up. She held the back of the chair opposite me with both hands and said, "How goes it, col?" Then she sat down.

She was a little drunk, I thought.

"It's boring here, don't you think?" she continued after a moment. "Shall we take off somewhere, col?"

"I'm not a col," I said. She leaned on the table with her elbows and moved her hand across her half-filled glass until the end of the golden chain around her fingers dipped into the liquid. She leaned still closer. I could smell her breath. If she was drunk, it was not from alcohol.

"How's that?" she said. "You are. You have to be. Everybody is. What do you say? Shall we?"

If only I knew what this meant.

"All right," I said.

She took me by the arm and led me toward a dark-gold wall, to a mark on it, a little like a treble clef, lit up. At our approach the wall opened. I felt a gust of hot air.

A narrow, silver escalator flowed down. We stood side by side. She did not even come up to my shoulder. She had a catlike head, black hair with a blue sheen, a profile that was perhaps too sharp, but she was pretty. If it were not for those scarlet nostrils . . . She held on to me tightly with her thin hand, the green nails digging into my heavy sweater. We went out, passing a number of half-empty bars and shop windows in which groups of mannequins were performing the same scene over and over again, and I would have liked to stop and see what they were doing, but the girl hurried along, her slippers clicking.

"Where shall we go?" the girl asked. She still held me by the arm. She slackened her pace. A red stripe, reflected from a nearby shop, passed across her face.

"Wherever you like."

"My place, then. It isn't worth taking a gleeder. It's nearby."

We came upon a moving walkway; we stood on it, a strange pair; lights swam by; now and then a vehicle shot along as if cast from a single block of black metal; they had no windows, no wheels, not even lights, and they careered as if blindly and at tremendous speed. The girl suddenly stepped off the flowing ribbon, but only to mount another that darted steeply upward, and I found myself suddenly high up; this aerial ride lasted perhaps half a minute and ended on a ledge full of weakly fragrant flowers. It was as if we had reached the terrace or balcony of a dark building by a conveyor belt set against the wall.

The girl entered this loggia, and from it, my eyes now accustomed to the dark, I was able to discern the huge outlines of the surrounding buildings, windowless, black, seemingly lifeless, for they were without more than light—not the slightest sound

reached me, apart from the sharp hiss that announced the passage in the street of those black machines.

"Come on, where are you?" I heard her whisper. I saw only the pale smudge of her face. She put her hand to the door, and it opened, but not into an apartment, and the floor moved softly together with us.

We were in something like a huge entrance hall or corridor, wide, almost dark. Only the corners of the walls shone, brightened by streaks of luminous paint. In the darkest place the girl again put the palm of her hand flat against a metal plate on a door and entered first. I blinked. The hall, brightly lit, was almost empty. She walked to the next door.

I followed her in.

The furniture looked as if it had been cast in glass: armchairs, a low sofa, small tables. Inside the semitransparent material swarms of fireflies circulated freely; sometimes they dispersed, then they would join again into streams, and it seemed that a

*She did not even
come up to my shoulder.
She had a catlike
head, black hair . . . a
profile . . . perhaps
too sharp, but she was
pretty. If it weren't
for those scarlet nostrils.*

luminous blood coursed in the furniture, pale green, commingled with pink sparks.

"Why don't you sit down."

She was standing far back. An armchair unfolded itself to receive me. I hated that. The "glass" was not glass at all—the impression I had was of sitting on inflated cushions, and, looking down, I could see the floor indistinctly through the curved, thick surface of the seat.

I made myself comfortable in the chair. The girl, her hand on her hip—her abdomen really did look like a sculpture in azure metal—studied me carefully. She no longer appeared drunk. Perhaps it had only seemed that way to me before.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Bregg. Hal Bregg. And yours?"

"Nais," she answered, then asked, "How old are you?"

Curious manners, I thought. But if that's what's done . . .

"Forty. What about it?"

"Nothing. I thought you were a hundred."

I had to smile.

"I can be that, if you insist." The funny thing is, it's the truth, I thought.

"What can I give you?" she asked.

"To drink? Nothing, thank you."

"All right."

She went to the wall, which opened like a small bar. She stood in front of the opening. When she returned, she was carrying a tray with cups and two bottles. Squeezing one bottle lightly, she filled me a cup to the brim. The liquid looked exactly like milk.

"Thank you," I said, "not for me."

"But I'm not giving you anything," she said, seemingly surprised.

Seeing I had made a mistake, although I did not know what kind of mistake, I muttered under my breath and took the cup. She poured herself a drink from the second bottle. This liquid was oily, colorless, and slightly effervescent under the surface; at the same time it darkened, apparently on contact with air. She sat down and, touching the glass with her lips, casually asked, "Who are you?"

"A col," I answered. I lifted my cup, as if to examine it. This milk had no smell. I did not touch it.

"No, seriously," she said. "You thought I was sending in the dark, eh? Since when? That was only a cal. I was with a six, you see, but it got awfully bottom. The orka was no good, and altogether . . . I was just going when you sat down."

Some of this I could figure out: I must have sat at her table by accident when she was not there; could she have been dancing? I maintained a tactful silence.

"From a distance, you seemed so . . ." She was unable to find the proper word.

"Decent?" I suggested. Her eyelids fluttered. Did she have a metallic film on them as well? No, it must have been eyeshadow.

"What does that mean?"

"Well . . . um . . . someone you could trust . . ." I said.

"You talk in a strange way. Where are you from?"

"From far away."

"Mars?"

"Farther."

"You fly?"

"I did fly."

"And now?"

"Nothing. I returned."

"But you'll fly again?"

"I don't know. Probably not."

The conversation had trailed off somehow. It seemed to me that the girl was beginning to regret her rash invitation, and I wanted to make it easy for her.

"Maybe I ought to go now?" I ventured. I still held my untouched drink.

"Why?" She was genuinely surprised.

"I thought that that would . . . suit you."

"No," she said. "You're thinking—no, what for . . . Why don't you drink?"

"I am drinking," I replied.

It was milk after all. At this time of day, in such circumstances! My surprise was such that she must have noticed it.

"What, is it bad?"

"It's milk . . ." I said. I must have looked like a complete idiot.

"What? What milk? That's brit."

I sighed and started to get up.

"Listen, Nais. I think I'll go now. Really, it will be better that way."

"Then why did you drink?" she asked.

I looked at her, in silence. The language had not changed so very much, and yet I didn't understand a thing. Not a thing. It was they who had changed.

"All right," she said finally. "I'm not keeping you. But now this..." She was confused. She drank her lemonade—that's what I called the sparkling liquid, in my thoughts—and again I did not know what to say. How difficult all this was!

"Tell me about yourself," I suggested. "Do you want to?"

"Okay. And then you'll tell me?"

"Yes."

"I'm at the Cavuta, in my second year. I've been neglecting things a bit lately. I wasn't plating regularly, and... that's how it's been. My six isn't too interesting. So really it's... I don't have anyone. It's strange..."

"What is?"

"That I don't have..."

Again these obscurities. Whom was she talking about? Whom didn't she have? Partners? Lovers? Acquaintances?

"And what else?" I asked, and, since I was still holding the cup, I took another swallow of that milk. Her eyes grew wide in surprise. Something like a mocking smile touched her lips. She drained her cup, reached out a hand to the fluffy covering on her arms, and tore it. She did not unbutton it, did not slip it off, just tore it, and let the shreds fall from her fingers, like trash.

"But then we hardly know each other," she said. She was freer, it seemed. She smiled. There were moments when she became quite lovely, particularly when she narrowed her eyes and when her lower lip, curling, revealed glistening teeth. In her face there was something Egyptian. An Egyptian cat. Hair blacker than black. When she pulled the furry fluff from her arms and breasts, I saw that she was not nearly so thin as I had thought. But why had she ripped it off? Was that supposed to mean something?

"Your turn to talk," she said, looking at me over her cup.

"Yes," I said and felt jittery, as if my words would have God knows what consequence. "I am... I was a pilot. The last time I was here... Don't be frightened."

"No. Go on."

Her eyes were shining and attentive.

"It was a hundred and twenty-seven years ago. I was thirty then. The expedition... I was a pilot on the expedition to Fomalhaut. That's twenty-three light-years away. We flew there and back, in a hundred and twenty-seven years, Earth time, and ten years, ship time. Four days ago we returned. The *Prometheus*, my ship, remained on Luna. I came from there today. That's all."

She stared at me. She did not speak. Her lips moved, opened, closed. What was that in her eyes? Surprise? Admiration? Fear?

"Why do you say nothing?" I asked.

"So... how old are you, really?"

Again I smiled; it was not a pleasant smile.

"What does that mean—really? Biologically I'm forty, but by Earth clocks, one hundred and fifty-seven..."

A long silence, then suddenly: "Were there any women there?"

"Wait," I said. "Do you have anything to drink?"

"What do you mean?"

"Something toxic, you understand. Strong. Alcohol... or don't they drink it anymore?"

"Very rarely," she replied softly as if thinking of something else. Her hands fell slowly, touching the metallic blue of her dress.

"I'll give you some... anghen. Is that all right? But you don't even know what it is, do you?"

"No, I don't," I retorted with unexpected stubbornness. She went to the bar and brought back a small, bulging bottle. She poured me a drink. It had some alcohol in it, but there was something else that gave it a

● So that's what
a cigarette looks like...
No, wait—the other
thing is more important.
Brit is not milk. I
don't know what's in it,
but—to a stranger—
one always gives brit. ●

peculiar, bitter taste.

"Don't be angry," I said, emptying the cup, and I poured myself another one.

"I'm not angry. You didn't answer, but perhaps you don't want to?"

"Why not? I can tell you. There were twenty-three of us altogether, on two ships. The other ship was the *Ulysses*. Five pilots to a ship, and the rest—scientists. There were no women."

"Why?"

"Because of children," I explained. "You can't raise children on such ships, and even if you could, no one would want to. You can't fly before you're thirty. You have to have two diplomas under your belt, and four years of training, twelve years in all. In other words, women of thirty usually have children."

"And you?" she asked.

"I was single. They selected unmarried ones. That is—volunteers."

"You wanted to..."

"Yes. Of course."

"It must be weird... coming back, like this..." she said almost in a whisper. She shuddered. Suddenly she looked at me. Her cheeks darkened; it was a blush.

"Listen, what I said before, that was just a joke, really..."

"About the hundred years?" I asked.

"I was just talking. It had no..."

"Stop," I grumbled. "Any more apologizing and I'll really feel that time."

She was silent. I forced myself to look away from her.

"What will you do?" she asked quietly.

"I don't know. I don't know yet."

"You have no plans?"

"No. I have a little—it's a... bonus, you understand. For all that time. When we left, it was put into the bank in my name—I don't even know how much there is. I don't know a thing. Listen, what is this Cavuta?"

"The Cavuta?" she corrected me. "It's... a sort of school, plating; nothing great in itself, but sometimes one can get into the reals."

"Wait... Then what exactly do you do?"

"Plast. You don't know what that is?"

"No."

"How can I explain? One makes dresses, clothing in general—everything..."

"Tailoring?"

"What does that mean?"

"Do you sew things?"

"I don't understand."

"Ye gods and little fishes! Do you design dresses?"

"Well... yes, in a sense, yes. I don't design; I only make..."

I gave up.

"And what is a real?" I asked.

That truly floored her. For the first time she looked at me as if I were a creature from another world.

"A real is... a real..." she repeated helplessly. "They are... stories. It's for watching..."

"Movies? Theater?"

"No. Theater, I know what that was—that was long ago. I know. They had actual people there. A real is artificial, but one can't tell the difference. Unless, I suppose, one got in there, inside..."

"Got in? Listen, Nais," I said, "either I'll go now, because it's very late, or..."

"I'd prefer the 'or'."

"But you don't know what I want to say."

"Say it then."

"All right. I wanted to ask you more about various things. About the big things, the most important ones. I already know something. I spent four days at Adapt, on Luna, but that was a drop in the bucket. What do you do when you aren't working?"

"One can do a pile of things," she answered. "One can travel, actually or by moot. One can have fun, go to the real, dance, play tereo, participate in sports, swim, fly—whatever one wants."

"What is a moot?"

"It's a little like the real, except you can touch everything. You can walk on mountains there, on anything—you'll see for yourself; it's not the sort of thing you can describe. But I had the impression you wanted to ask about something else."

"Your impression is right. How is it—between men and women?"

"I suppose the way it has always been. What can have changed?"

"Everything. When I left—don't take this the wrong way—a girl like you would not have brought me to her place at this hour."

"Really? Why not?"

"Because it would have meant only one thing."

She was silent for a second.

"And how do you know it didn't?"

My expression amused her. I looked at her, and she stopped smiling.

"Nais... how is it..." I stammered. "You take a complete stranger and..."

She said nothing.

"Why don't you answer?"

"Because you don't understand a thing. I don't know how to tell you. It's nothing, you know..."

"Aha. It's nothing," I repeated. "Are there still marriages?"

"Naturally."

"I don't understand. Explain this to me. You see a man who appeals to you, and, without knowing him, right away..."

"But what is there to tell?" she said reluctantly. "Was it really true, in your day, back then, that a girl couldn't let a man into her room?"

"She could, of course, and even with that purpose, but... not five minutes after seeing him..."

"How many minutes then?"

I looked at her. She was quite serious. Well, yes, how was she to know? I shrugged.

"It wasn't a matter of time only. First of all she had to... see something in him, get to know him, like him. First of all they went out together..."

"Wait," she said. "It seems that you... don't understand a thing. After all, I gave you brit."

"What brit? Ah, the milk? What of it?"

"What do you mean, what of it? Was there... no brit?"

She began to laugh; she was convulsed with laughter. Then suddenly she broke off, looked at me, and reddened terribly.

"So you thought... you thought that I... no." My fingers were unsteady; I wanted to hold something in them. I pulled a cigarette from my pocket and lit it.

"What is that?"

"A cigarette. What—you don't smoke?"

"It's the first time I ever saw one... So that's what a cigarette looks like. How can you inhale the smoke like that? No, wait—the other thing is more important. Brit is not milk. I don't know what's in it, but—to a stranger—one always gives brit."

"To a man?"

"Yes."

"What does it do?"

"What it does is that he behaves, that he has to. You know. Maybe some biologist can explain it to you."

"To hell with the biologist. Does this mean that a man to whom you've given brit can't do anything?"

"Naturally."

"What if he doesn't want to drink?"

"How could he not want to?"

Here all understanding ended.

"But you can't force him to drink," I continued patiently.

"A madman might not drink..." she said slowly. "But I never heard of such a thing."

"Is this some kind of custom?"

"I don't know what to tell you. Is it a custom that you don't go around naked?"

"Aha. Well, in a sense, yes. But you can undress on the beach."

"Completely?" she asked with sudden interest.

"No. A swimsuit. But there were groups of people in my day, called nudists..."

"I know. No, that's something else. I thought that you all..."

"No. So this drinking is... like wearing clothes? Just as necessary?"

"Yes. When there are... two of you."

"Well, and afterwards?"

"What afterwards?"

"The next time?"

This conversation was idiotic, and I felt terrible, but I had to find out.

"Later? It varies. To some... you always give brit..."

"The rejected suitor," I blurted out.

"What does that mean?"

"No, nothing. And if a girl visits a man, what then?"

"Then he drinks it at his place."

She looked at me almost with pity. But I was stubborn.

"And when he hasn't any?"

"Any brit? How could he not have it?"

"Well, he ran out. Or... he could always lie."

She began to laugh. "But that's... You think that I keep bottles here in my apartment?"

"You don't? Where then?"

"Where they come from, I don't know. In your day was there tap water?"

"There was," I said glumly. There could not have been, of course. I could have climbed into the rocket straight from the forest. I was furious for a moment, but I calmed down; it was not, after all, her fault.

"There, you see! Did you know in which direction the water flowed before it..."

"I understand. No need to go on. All right. So is it a kind of safety measure? Very strange! How long does brit work?" I asked.

She blushed slightly.

"You're in such a hurry. You still don't understand anything."

"I didn't say anything wrong," I defended myself. "I only wanted to know... Why are you looking at me like that? What's the matter with you? Nais!"

She got up slowly. She stood behind the armchair.

"How long ago—did you say? A hundred and twenty years?"

"A hundred and twenty-seven. What about it?"

"And were you... betrizated?"

"What is that?"

"You weren't?"

"I don't even know what it means. Nais... girl, what's the matter with you?"

"No... you weren't," she whispered. "If you had been, you would know..."

I began to go to her. She raised her hands.

"Keep away! No! No! I beg you."

She retreated to the wall.

"But you yourself said that brit... I'm sitting now. You see, I'm sitting. Calm yourself. Tell me what it is, this bet... or whatever."

"I don't know exactly. But everyone is betrizated. At birth."

"What is it?"

"They put something into the blood. I think."

"Do they do it to everyone?"

"Yes. Because... brit... doesn't work without that. Don't move."

"Child, don't be ridiculous."

I crushed out my cigarette.

"I am not a wild animal... Don't be angry, but it seems to me that you've all gone a little mad. This brit... Well, it's like handcuffing everyone because someone might turn out to be a thief. I mean... there ought to be a little trust."

"You're terrific." She seemed calmer, but still she did not sit. "Then why were you so indignant before, about my bringing strangers home?"

"That's something else."

"I don't see the difference. You're sure you weren't betrizated?"

"I wasn't."

"But maybe now? When you returned?"

"I don't know. They gave me all kinds of shots. What importance does it have?"

"It has. They did that? Good."

She sat down.

"I have a favor to ask you," I said as calmly as I could. "You must explain to me..."

"What?"

"Your fear. Did you think I would attack you, or what? But that's ridiculous."

"You'd understand if I told you. Bettrization, you see, isn't done by brit. With the brit, it's only—a side effect... Bettrization has to do with something else..." She was pale. Her lips trembled.

What a world, I thought, what a world this is!

"I can't. I'm terribly afraid."

"Of me?"

"Yes."

"I swear that..."

"No, no... I believe you, only... no. You can't understand this."

"You won't tell me?"

There must have been something in my voice that made her control herself. Her face grew grim. I saw from her eyes the effort it was for her.

"It is... so that... in order that it be impossible to... kill."

"No. People?"

"Anyone..."

"Animals, too?"

"Animals... anyone..."

She twisted and untwisted her fingers, not taking her eyes off me, as if with these words she had released me from an invisible chain, as if she had put a knife into my

hand — a knife I could stab her with.

"Nais," I said very quietly. "Nais, don't be afraid. Really ... there's nothing to fear."

She tried to smile.

"Listen ..."

"Yes?"

"When I said that ..."

"Yes?"

"You felt nothing?"

"And what was I supposed to feel?"

"Imagine that you are doing what I said to you ..."

"That I am killing? I'm supposed to picture that?"

She shuddered.

"Yes ..."

"And now?"

"And you feel nothing?"

"Nothing. But then it's only a thought, and I have not the slightest intention ..."

"But you can? Right? You really can? No," she whispered, as if to herself, "you are not petrified ..."

Only now did the meaning of it all hit me; I understood how it could be a shock to her.

"This is a great thing," I muttered. After a moment I added, "But it would have been better, perhaps, had people ceased to do it ... without artificial means ..."

"I don't know. Perhaps," she answered. She drew a deep breath. "You know now why I was frightened?"

"Yes, but not completely. Maybe a little. But surely you didn't think that I ..."

"How strange you are! It's altogether as if you weren't ..."

She broke off.

"Weren't human?"

"I didn't mean to offend you. It's just that, you see, if it is known that no one can, you know even think about it, ever — and suddenly someone appears, like you — then the very possibility ... the fact that there is one who ..."

"I can't believe that everyone would be — how was it? — petrified!"

"Why? Everyone, I tell you!"

"No, it's impossible," I insisted. "What about people with dangerous jobs? After all, they must ..."

"There are no dangerous jobs."

"What are you saying, Nais? What about pilots? What about rescue workers? What about those who fight fire, water?"

"There are no such people," she said. I thought that I must not have heard her right.

"What?"

"No such people," she repeated. "It is done by robots."

There was silence. It would not be easy for me, I thought, to stomach this new world. And suddenly came a reflection, surprising in that I myself would never have expected it if someone had presented me with this situation purely as a theoretical possibility: It seemed to me that this measure destroying the killer in man was ... a kind of disfigurement.

"Nais," I said, "it's already very late, I think I'll go."

"Where?"

"I don't know ... I'll look for a hotel. There

are hotels?"

"There are. Bregg."

"Yes?"

"Stay."

"What?"

She did not speak.

"You want me to stay?"

I went up to her, took hold of her, bending over the chair, by her cold arms, and lifted her up. She stood submissively. Her head fell back; her teeth glistened. I did not want her; I wanted only to say, "But you're afraid," and wanted only for her to say that she was not. Nothing more. Her eyes were closed, but suddenly the whites shone from underneath her lashes; I bent over her face and looked into her glassy eyes, as if I wished to know her fear, to share it. She struggled to break loose, but I did not feel it; it was only when she began to groan, "No! No!" that I slackened my grip. She nearly fell.

"Nais ...," I said quietly. Then I dropped my hands.

"Don't come near me!"

"But it was you who said ..."

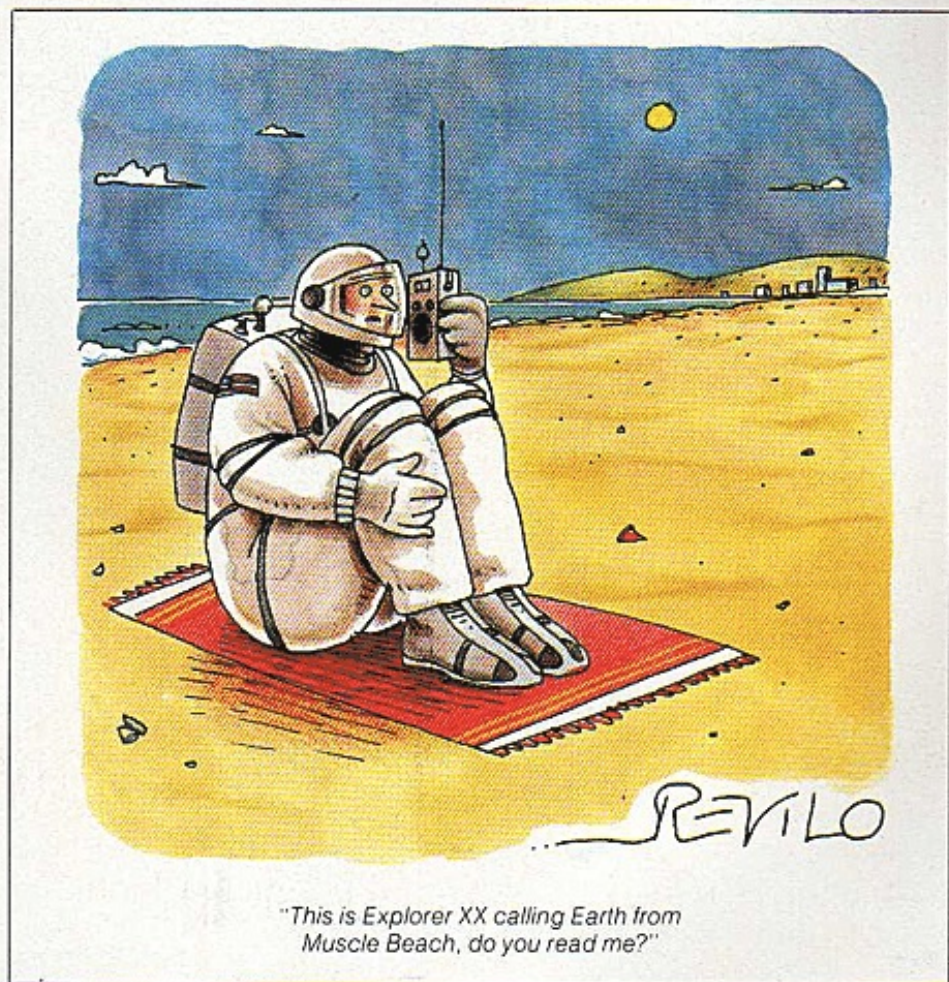
Her eyes were wild.

"I'm going now," I announced. She said nothing. I wanted to add something — a few words of apology, of thanks — so as not to leave this way, but I couldn't. Had she been afraid only as a woman is of a man, a strange, even threatening, unknown man, then the hell with it. But this was something else. I looked at her and felt anger growing

in me. To grab those white, naked arms and shake her ...

I turned and left. I remember that later I sat by a fountain, or perhaps it was not a fountain; I stood up and walked on in the spreading light of the new day until I woke from my stupor in front of large, glowing windows and the fiery letters ALCARON HOTEL.

In the doorkeeper's box, which resembled a giant's overturned bathtub, sat a robot, beautifully styled, semitransparent, with long delicate arms. Without asking a thing, it passed me the guest book. I signed it and rode up with a small, triangular ticket. Someone — I have no idea who — helped me open the door or, rather, did it for me. Walls of ice, and in them — circulating fires; under the window, at my approach, a chair emerged from nothing and slid under me; a flat tabletop had begun to descend, making a kind of desk, but it was a bed that I wanted. I could not find one and did not even attempt to look. I lay down on the foamy carpet and immediately fell asleep in the artificial light of the windowless room, for what I had at first taken to be a window turned out to be a television set, and I drifted off with the knowledge that from there, from behind the glass plate, some giant face was grimacing at me, meditating over me, laughing, chattering, babbling. I was delivered by a sleep like death; in it, even time stood still.

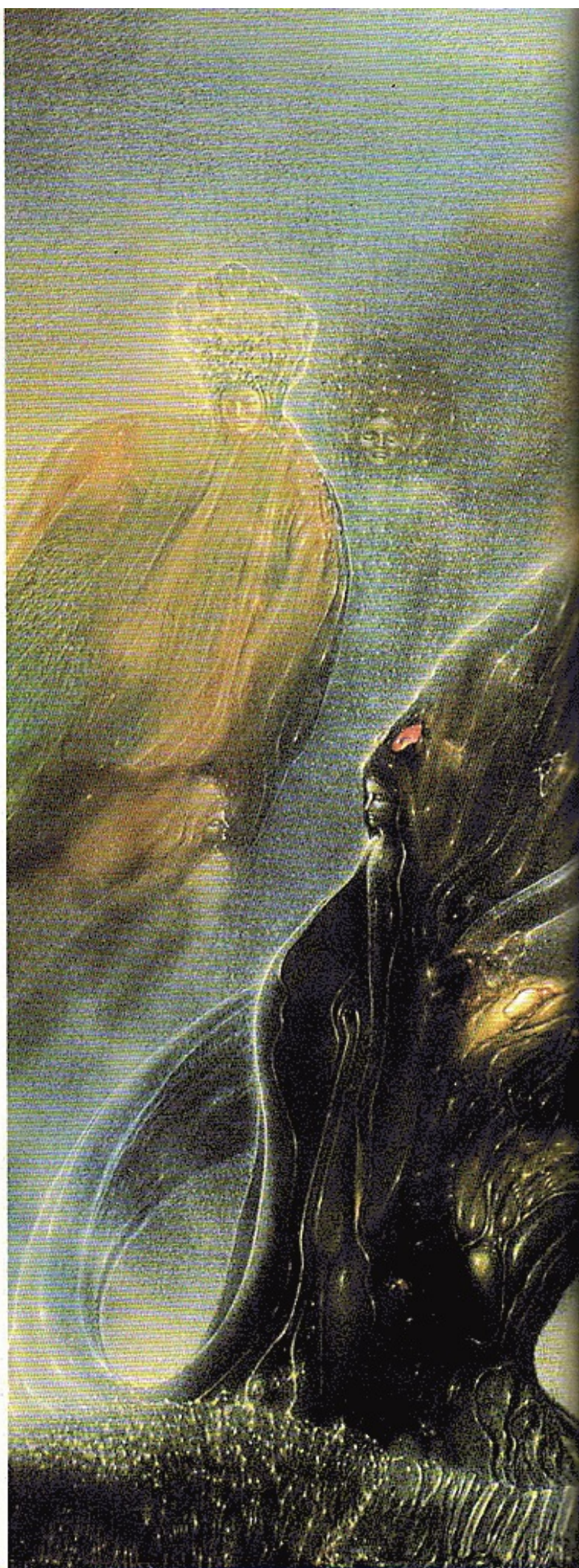


"This is Explorer XX calling Earth from Muscle Beach, do you read me?"

TRANSFORMATIONS

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

Man
into animal, flesh into
spirit; something
mysteriously becomes something
else. Uncanny images
of the imagination are shown
here in the works of
Marshall Arisman, and
Bob Venosa.







Transformation—its prediction, its control, its meaning—has always been the province of the priest, the shaman, and the artist. Magic itself, the precursor of science, is essentially the study and control of changes. Alchemy, the study of magical transformations, metamorphoses into chemistry, the study of transformations in substances. Scientists look to artists for insights into the nature of the world. Art delineates the processes of the imagination, creating syntheses of fantastic and factual elements too complex to be explained in words.

●We shuffle things and arrange them, not as they are, but as we want them to be.●







Presidential Transcript No. 21
Recording dated: 17 January 1996
Location: The Oval Office
Subject: The President's Image

THE PRESIDENT'S IMAGE

BY STEPHEN ROBINETT

I have called you all here for a special reason. The '96 primary looms before us, and I have yet to announce. I want all of you to be the first to hear my decision. To quote one of my predecessors in this office: If nominated, I will not run.

Groans and disappointment? Hear me out. Only then will you understand my decision.

The latest polls show a new issue emerging, one that could overshadow the excellent record we have compiled. The issue has nothing to do with our programs. Those have been embraced enthusiastically by the American people. The problem is of a different order, not the substance of our administration, but the form, the image, more accurately, my image.

Let me be more specific. According to our sampling, I am seen by the electorate as competent, efficient, imaginative, and innovative, but in failing health. Rumors about my health have proliferated. My ability to last out another four-year term is questioned. The media have dubbed us the Haggard administration.

PAINTING BY FRIEDRICH HECHELMANN

Haggard—that is the operative word. A computer model of the next election shows the issue could be controlling, especially if our opponents are given any opportunity at all to make political hay out of this straw man. As you all can see, I look no more haggard now than the day I took office. It is simply our higher profile in preparation for the Ninety-six campaign that has brought the issue to public attention.

Okay, on to the purpose of this briefing. Some of you don't know all the details of how our present situation came about. I'll outline them as succinctly as possible and have a transcript made for reference. I don't want any misunderstandings about the game plan.

How did it start? That's the big question. It started with the attempted assassination of Senator Mirada in Los Angeles before the last election. As most of you know, I had not yet joined the campaign, but the senator was leading our party full stride toward the White House. When he heard the hornet buzz of the assassin's bullet, his stride, understandably, faltered.

The next day the senator called in Fred Thoroughway. You all know Fred over there. He was chief of campaign security in those days. According to Fred, the senator looked like death warmed over. His skin was the color of old newspaper, and dark circles showed under his eyes. He seemed to have aged a decade overnight. The demands of a too ambitious career, combined with his dubious personal habits—he drank, smoked, and philandered to excess—had completely weakened his constitution. The assassination attempt threatened to break it. He kept muttering to Fred about seeing the face of Death in the crowd. He told Fred something had to be done. He could not go on, with the Grim Reaper dogging him over the campaign trail. The Grim Reaper, in all his guises, had to be neutralized.

Neutralized—a fine word. But how? Fred was caught between the proverbial rock and the equally proverbial hard place. If he did nothing and hoped they could get through the Ninety-two election with a sane candidate, some nut would probably try again and the senator's taut nerves would snap. If, in an effort to ease the senator's troubled mind, he threw on a total security wrap, Senator Mirada would never get close enough to the electorate to become President Mirada. Still, an order to neutralize was an order to neutralize, no matter how imposing the task.

For a week Fred toured security services in Los Angeles. With more than its share of nuts, Fred reasoned, Los Angeles would have state-of-the-art technology for dealing with them. He examined electrical, chemical, and mechanical gadgets. Some of them would have stopped riots. Some would have destroyed cities. None would stop a lone assassin bent on murder who had no regard for his own safety, precisely

the kind of man Senator Mirada wanted neutralized.

That weekend, to escape temporarily from the growing frustration of his search, Fred took his son to Disneyland. The trip proved fateful. After a particularly nauseating spin on the Mad Hatter's Teacup—son squealing with glee, father losing most of his lunch—Freddie Junior dragged his father in to hear Lincoln deliver the Gettysburg Address.

Fred Senior had seen the exhibit years before when it was a mechanical man. The mechanical Lincoln had long since departed. Now a holographically projected Lincoln, tied to a computer, stood in its place. Not only did it give a fine and moving delivery of the Gettysburg Address, but it answered questions from the audience as at a press conference.

One of the questions came from wide-eyed little Freddie Thoroughway at the foot of the dais. He asked Lincoln whether he knew how much he resembled Senator Mirada. Lincoln gave a kindly and paternal smile and said many people had made that observation to him. It reminded him of an anecdote from his own boyhood. He launched into a story about splitting rails in Illinois.

The story had nothing whatsoever to do with the boy's question, but Freddie thought it did. So, evidently, did everyone else in the room. The illusion was convincing. Fred Senior gazed up at the expounding Lincoln and knew he had found the solution to Senator Mirada's problem.

On Monday morning experts on computer-controlled holography were brought in, along with the most sophisticated equipment available. The senator took a break from campaigning, long enough to cover the recording session. Cameras and microphones recorded his every movement, head to toe, front to back, standing, sitting, walking, talking—especially talking.

The waveforms produced by the senator's every sound and movement were analyzed instantaneously and were assigned a two-hundred-fifty-six bit binary number. Numbers accumulated at a rate of one million per millimeter of recording tape. Tape passed through the machine at two meters a second. All of it was ultimately stored in a computer, a collection of something close to two billion digital information bits on the senator for every second of recording time. Thoroughway worked the senator hard, further damaging his already frail health, but managing to assemble one hundred hours of tape. They could now holographically reproduce every movement and sound the senator was capable of making, together with a few he would never be able to manage.

Then came the hard part. They had the form, the image. They needed substance. Every plank in the senator's platform was programmed in, along with details on the

problems of implementing each policy and the solutions to those problems. The program was given a capacity to deliver this information either as a formal speech, or as casual conversation, or as response to questions from an audience. It even contained a few all-purpose ripostes for hecklers.

When Thoroughway was satisfied, he called Senator Mirada in for a demonstration. He activated the equipment, all of it portable, and I joined them in the laboratory. Thoroughway asked me about tax-reform legislation, covering it both from the substantive angle and from the practicality of getting such legislation through Congress. I answered satisfactorily. Senator Mirada asked me about foreign policy issues—the Tierra del Fuego War, the Lisbon coup, the Sino-Japanese Mutual Defense Pact. Again I answered each question, one or two of them with well-turned and—if I do say so myself—witty responses.

The senator was impressed. He put one of his arms across Fred's shoulders and talked into his ear, saying the success with me would allow him to do what he had longed to do from the first days of the campaign, take a relaxed and extended vacation to restore his health. He gestured at me and said I could do what he called "the mundane work of getting elected."

We got postcards from the senator in Tahiti, all signed with his Secret Service code name, *Cheshire Cat One*. He sent one photograph of a man with his face averted and his arms around two young Tahitian girls. He was having a wonderful time and wished we were there.

While the senator chased grass skirts in Tahiti, I worked night and day at the mundane work of getting elected. Before every public appearance, Thoroughway set up the equipment under the hustings, sometimes an outdoor podium, sometimes an indoor stage. He gave orders to have the motorcade stop within range of the projector. When the senator's limo came to a halt, Thoroughway flicked on the equipment. The limo door slid open, I got out, smiling, waving, politicking.

Though I didn't kiss any babies or shake any hands—an impossibility under the circumstances—I did give rousing, Lincoln-esque speeches. Even the media began talking about the "new" Senator Mirada, better organized, better prepared on the issues, more responsive to questions, quicker-witted. We moved up in the polls. No one saw me then as having served four years in a man-killing job. So there was little comment on my appearance.

None of our success pleased Fred. From time to time he would have me join him late at night and discuss the matter. He had been through many campaigns, and something *always* went wrong. Either little things went wrong all the time—late planes, rained-out rallies, slipshod advance work—or something big went wrong all at once. The longer we went without small

disasters, the more Fred's forebodings told him a big one was on the way.

It arrived November 4, 1992, one day after we squeaked into office, and while most of you were still under the weather from the victory party, Senator Mirada—now on the wagon, a nonsmoker, and a jogger—had discovered a new way of life, more tranquil, healthier, without the crushing burden of governing the most powerful nation on Earth. As he said in that final postcard, he felt himself to be in harmony with the seasons and the tides. He had decided to trade in the smoke-filled rooms of Washington for the fresh air and sunshine of Tahiti, permanently.

That gave us a problem. I'm sure you all remember the meeting. Most of you were hysterical over the possible consequences of his decision. I had to take charge. We voted. We arrived at our decision democratically. What we did we did for the good of the country. We had already done the mundane work of getting elected. Could we stand by and simply give away that election? Was one man that indispensable? Besides, we had programs we believed in—programs the country needed.

Looking back, I think we can say we made the right decision. My personal popularity is high, my record good. We have only this single issue, my health, to deal with. I have already taken steps to remedy the situation.

Last week I dispatched an urgent telegram to Tahiti, followed by a two-hour satellite conversation with visual linkup. I must say, Tahiti has agreed with him. He looks tan, rested, and content. He has followed events here and approves of our accomplishments. Indeed, he is convinced that we have done a better job in office than he could ever have managed—an endorsement I deeply appreciate.

In any case, we spent much of the two hours examining our options. He suggested the most obvious solution, a new tape showing a fit and healthy image. I had to veto that one. The media have already made a big deal out of my reluctance to shake hands—the Howard Hughes Syndrome, they call it—suggesting it indicates a neurotic fear of germs, hypochondria, evidence of potential mental instability. I pointed out to him that we had to squelch that sort of talk rather than encourage it. He saw my point. Still, he was hesitant to leave his Shangri-La. Only after further negotiation and firm promise that *Air Force One* would make frequent and prolonged trips to Tahiti did he agree to cooperate.

I think, ladies and gentlemen, we can now look forward to the four more years we need to realize our programs fully. As I said at the beginning of this briefing, I have made my decision. I think you now understand it. If nominated, I will not run, but, if elected—our friend from Tahiti should give us just the image we need for that mundane work—I will serve.

FUTURE BOOKS

BY CYNTHIA DARNELL

You probably thought that after the Bermuda Triangle there was nowhere to go but down. You were right. Given the current trend of publishing fairy tales under the guise of hard fact, we will undoubtedly find the following titles at our local bookstores much sooner than we would like.

The Punxsutawney Parallelogram: Since 1972 no fewer than nine automobiles and one Winnebago have vanished along an eight-kilometer stretch leading from Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to neighboring Chloe. Author Howard St. Phalle, intrigued by the disappearances, conducted an investigation. After careful research and some heavy soul-searching, St. Phalle concludes that the region is actually a "Black Turnpike," a cosmic shortcut between universes. Evidence of this includes the discovery of an ominous, perfectly square pothole. But the author's most persuasive argument is that no one with a grasp of reality, as we know it, would build a road between Punxsutawney and Chloe.

Fred Holds Forth: Until he was nine years old, Peter Grunswacken, of Westport, Connecticut, was thought to have a speech defect. But when a neighbor recorded the child's voice with the intent of getting a few laughs at a party, the tape was accidentally played backwards. The drunken revelers were astonished to hear the slurred voice of a higher life form claiming to be not Peter but Fred, who immediately accused the host of putting a French label on a bottle of Ripple.

Prodded by promises of Oreos, the mystical Fred began making pronouncements of a metaphysical sort. These are dutifully gathered in this book, with an Afterword promising a sequel as soon as Peter has gone through orthodontics.

The more provocative disclosures include (1) the world ended on March 3, 1898, but they haven't finished the paperwork yet; (2) television is good for you; (3) Yorkshire terriers are actually members of the insect family; and (4) Paul McCartney might be dead after all.

Food Signs: This book is an inquiry into how the astrological sign of the food we eat can affect our well-being. For example, a Libra person who ingests an Aries taco and a Pisces chili dog while the sun is in Gemini is really asking for it.

This same combination, however, is perfectly safe for a Taurus, provided the taco has Saturn in the Fifth House and the Taurus, if his or her rising sign is Scorpio, exercises extreme caution in traveling by motorboat on odd-numbered days.

Appendixes provide detailed instructions on how to chart your food and offer numerous sample recipes. The Scorpio-Rising Soufflé is highly recommended, although it takes several months to prepare.

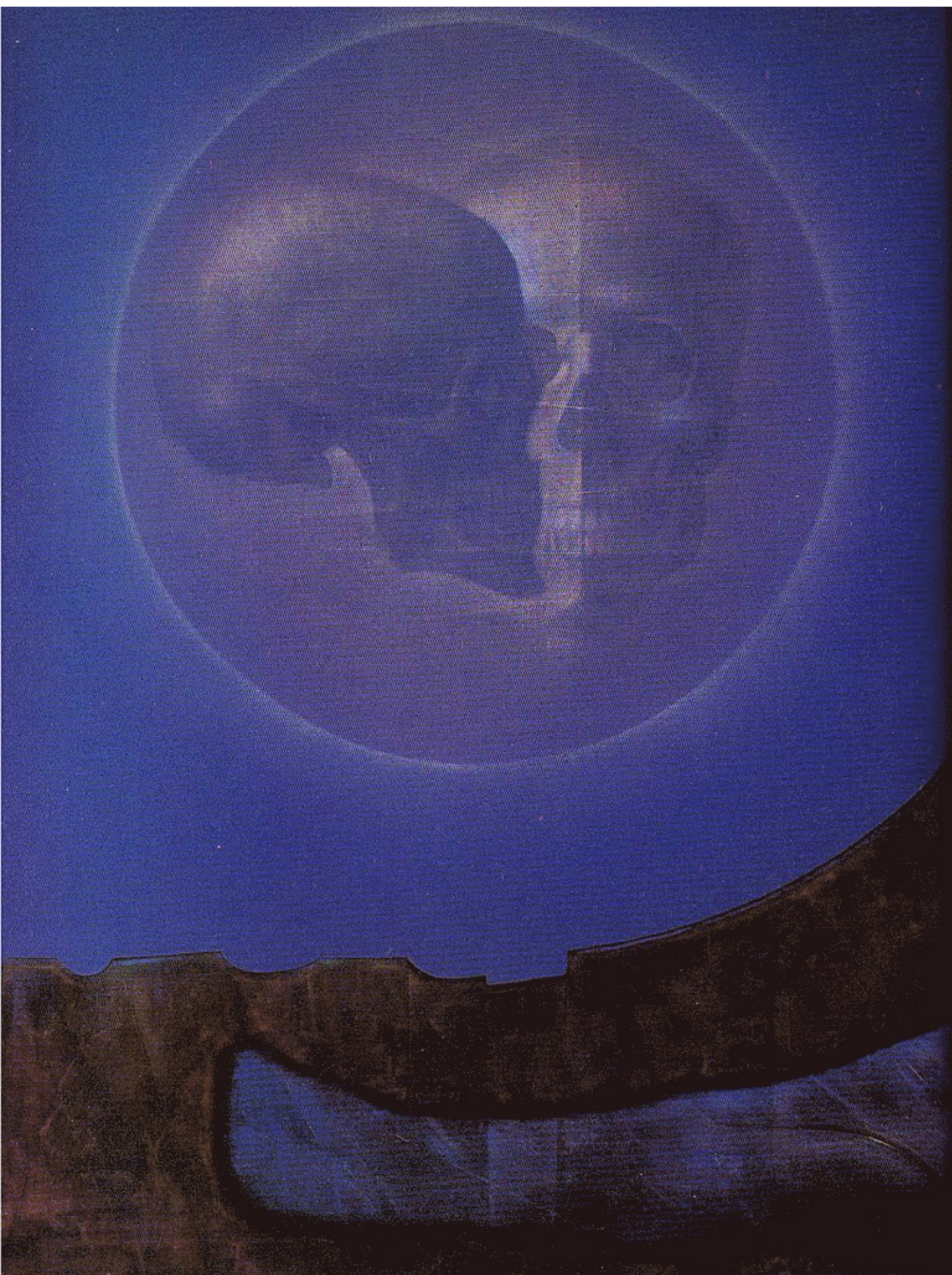
The Quick-Loss Reincarnation Diet: Well-known advice columnist Dr. Gigi has come up with a simple, foolproof method for taking off weight and keeping it off. Once you have established contact with your previous incarnations (you can learn how to do this by mailing in the coupon on the flyleaf and \$250), you can transfer extra calories and fat molecules onto the hips of someone you used to be. After all, he's dead. Why should he care?

The Lost Continent of Idaho: The fabled continent of Idaho has long figured in Northwestern United States folklore. Supposedly, the Lost Continent was the home of a highly developed race that invented, and lived in, condominiums. When the glaciers retreated at the end of the Ice Age, Idaho went with them for the ride but took a wrong turn and was never heard from again.

Curve Power: This book takes off from the premise that straight lines and angles are inherently unnatural and are thus responsible for all of us being so messed up. Mankind's only salvation lies in a return to the curve, the arc, the gentle undulation, the amorphous lump.

In a subtle dig at another popular theory, the author points out that a pyramid may indeed keep a razor blade sharp. But the razor blade itself is a product of straight-line-and-angle thinking; so who needs it? Parts of this book make a lot of sense.

As our final entry we have Joseph Turtle's *How to Build a Black Hole*. The author tells the reader how to adapt a used event horizon, provides games that can be played with your black hole, suggests how to store it, and so on. Not the least interesting feature of this book is that it will handily engulf all the other books on this list and still have enough power left to swallow itself.





Science could conquer death, she knew. But could she deal with what came after death?

SOUL SEARCH

BY SPIDER ROBINSON

Rebecca Howell stood trembling with anticipation beside the Plexiglas tank that contained the corpse of her husband, Archer.

A maelstrom of conflicting emotions raged within her: fondness, yearning, awe, lust, triumphant satisfaction, fierce joy, and an underlayer of fear all trying to coexist in the same skull. Perhaps no one in all human history had experienced that precise mix of emotions, for her situation was close to unique. Because she was who and what she was, it would shortly lead her to develop the first genuinely new motive for murder in several thousand years.

"Go ahead," she said aloud, and eight people in white crowded around the transparent cryotank with her. In practiced silence, they began doing things.

John Dimsdale touched her shoulder. "Reb," he said softly, "come on. Let them work."

"No."

"Reb, the first part is *not* pretty. I think you should—"

"Dammit, I know that!"

"I think," he repeated insistently, "you should come with me."

She stiffened, and then she saw some of the things the technicians were doing. "All right. Doctor Bharadwaj!"

One of the white-suited men looked up irritably.

PAINTING BY MICHEL HENRICOT

"Call me before you fire the pineal. Without fail." She let Dimsdale lead her from the room, down white-tiled corridors, to Bharadwaj's offices. His secretary looked up as they entered and hastened to open the door leading into the doctor's inner sanctum for them. Dimsdale dismissed him, and Rebecca sat down heavily in the luxurious desk chair, putting her feet up on Bharadwaj's desk. They were both silent for perhaps ten minutes.

"Eight years," she said finally. "Will it really work, John?"

"No reason why it shouldn't," he said. "Every reason why it should."

"It's never been done before."

"On a human, no. Not successfully. But the problems have been solved. It worked with those cats, didn't it? And that ape?"

"Yes, but —"

"Look, Bharadwaj knows perfectly well you'll have his skull for an ashtray if he fails. Do you think he'd try it at all if he weren't certain?"

After a pause she relaxed. "You're right, of course." She looked at him then, really seeing him for the first time that day, and her expression softened. "Thank you, John. I ... thank you for everything. This must be even harder for you than it —"

"Put it out of your mind," he interrupted hastily.

"I just feel so —"

"There is nothing for you to feel guilt over, Reb," he insisted. "I'm fine. When ... when love cannot possess, it is content to serve."

"Who said that?"

Dimsdale blushed. "Me," he admitted. "About fifteen years ago." And frequently thereafter, he added to himself. "So put it out of your mind, all right?"

She smiled. "As long as you know how grateful I am for you, I could never have maintained Archer's empire without you."

"Nonsense. What are your plans — for afterward, I mean?"

"When he's released? As few as possible. I thought he might enjoy a cruise around the world, sort of a reorientation. But I'm quite content to hole up on Luna or up in Alaska instead, or whatever he wants. As long as I'm with him, I ..."

Dimsdale knew precisely how she felt. After this week it might be weeks or years before he saw her again.

The phone rang, and he answered it. "Right. Let's go, Reb. They're ready."

The top of the cryotank had been removed now, allowing direct access to Archer Howell's defrosted body. At present it was only a body — no longer a corpse, not yet a man. It was "alive" in a certain technical sense, in that an array of machinery circulated its blood and pumped its lungs; but it was not yet Archer Howell. Dr. Bharadwaj awaited Rebecca Howell's command, as ordered, before firing the complex and precise charge through the pineal gland that, he believed, would restore independent life function — and consciousness — to the preserved flesh.

"The new liver is in place and functioning correctly," he told her when she arrived. "Indications are good. Shall I —"

"At once."

"Disconnect life-support," he snapped, and this was done. As soon as the body's integrity had been restored, he pressed a button. The body bucked in its Plexiglas cradle, then sank back limply. A technician shook her head, and Bharadwaj, sweating profusely, pressed the button a second time. The body spasmed again — and the eyes opened. The nostrils flared and drew in breath; the chest expanded; the fingers clenched spasmodically. Rebecca cried out. Dimsdale stared with round eyes, and Bharadwaj and his support team broke out in broad grins of relief and triumph.

And the first breath was expelled. In a long, high, unmistakably infantile wail.

Rebecca Howell's mind was both tough and resilient. The moment her subconscious decided she was ready to handle

*At present it was only a
body — no longer
a corpse, not yet a man.
It was 'alive' in
a certain technical sense,
in that an array
of machinery circulated
its blood ...*

consciousness again, it threw off heavy sedation like a flannel blanket. In the next room, the physician monitoring her telemetry started violently, wondering whether he could have catnapped without realizing it.

"What's wrong?" Dimsdale demanded.

"Nothing. Uh, she ... a second ago she was deep under, and —"

"Now she's wide awake," Dimsdale finished. "All right, stand by." He got up stiffly and went to her door. "Now comes the hard part," he said, too softly for the other to hear. Then he squared his shoulders and went in.

"Reb ..."

"It's all right, John. Truly, I'm okay. I'm terribly disappointed, of course, but, when you look at it in perspective, this is really just a minor setback."

"No," he said very quietly. "It isn't."

"Of course it is. Look, it's perfectly obvious what's happened. Some kind of cryonic trauma's wiped his mind. All his memories are gone. He'll have to start over again as an infant. But he's got a *mature brain*, John. He'll be an adult again in ten years, you wait and see if he isn't. I know him. Oh, he'll be different. He won't be the

man I knew; he'll have no memories in common with that man, and the new 'up-bringing' is bound to alter his personality some. I'll have to learn how to make him love me all over again. But I've got my Archer back!"

Dimsdale was struck dumb, as much by admiration for her indomitable spirit as by reluctance to tell her that she was dead wrong. He wished there were some honorable way he could die himself.

"What's ten years?" she chattered on, oblivious. "Hell, what's twenty years? We're both forty, now that I've caught up with him. With the medical we can afford, we're both good for a century and a quarter. We can have at least sixty more years together. That's four times as long as we've already had! I can be patient another decade or so for that." She smiled, then became businesslike. "I want you to start making arrangements for his care at once. I want him to have the best rehabilitation this planet can provide, the ideal childhood. I don't know what kind of experts we need to hire. You'll have to —"

"No!" Dimsdale cried.

She started, and looked at him closely. "John, what in God's name is wrong with —" She paled. "Oh my God, they've lost him, haven't they?"

"No," he managed to say. "No, Reb, they haven't lost him. They never had him."

"What the hell are you talking about?" she blazed. "I heard him cry, saw him wave his arms and piss himself. He was *alive*."

"He still is. Was when I came in here, probably still is. But he is not Archer Howell."

"What are you saying?"

"Bharadwaj said a lot I didn't understand. Something about brain waves, something about radically different indices on the something-or-other profile, something about different reflexes and different ... he was close to babbling. Archer was born after the development of the brain scan; so they have tapes on him from infancy. Eight experts and two computers agree Archer Howell's body is alive down the hall, but that's not him in it. Not even the infant Archer. Someone completely different." He shuddered. "A new person. A new, forty-year-old person."

The doctor outside was on his toes, feeding tranquilizers and sedatives into her system in a frantic attempt to keep his telemetry readings within acceptable limits. But her will was a hot sun, burning the fog off her mind as fast as it formed. "Impossible," she cried, and she sprang from the bed before Dimsdale could react, ripping tubes and wires loose. "You're wrong, all of you. That's my Archer!"

The doctor came in fast, trained and ready for anything, and she kicked him square in the stomach and leaped over him as he went down. She was out the door and into the hallway before Dimsdale could reach her.

When he came to the room assigned to

Archer Howell, Dimsdale found Rebecca sitting beside the bed, crooning softly and rocking back and forth. An intern and a nurse were sprawled on the floor, the nurse bleeding slowly from the nose. Dimsdale looked briefly at the diapered man on the bed and glanced away. He had once liked Archer Howell a great deal. "Reb—"

She glanced up and smiled. The smile sideswiped him.

"He knows me. I'm sure he does. He smiled at me." As she spoke a flailing hand caught one of hers, quite by accident. "See?" It clutched, babylike but with adult strength. She winced but kept the smile.

Dimsdale swallowed. "Reb, it's not him. I swear it's not. Bharadwaj and Nakamura are absolutely—"

The smile was gone now. "Go away, John. Go far away, and don't ever come back. You're fired."

He opened his mouth and then spun on his heel and left. A few steps down the hall he encountered Bharadwaj, alarmed and awesomely drunk. "She knows?"

"If you value your career, Doctor, leave her be. She knows, and she doesn't believe it."

Three years later Rebecca summoned him. Responding instantly cost him much, but he ignored that part of it. He was at her Alaskan retreat within an hour of the summons, slowed only by her odd request that he come alone, in disguise, and without telling anyone. He was brought to her den, where he found her alone, seated at her desk. Insofar as it was possible for one of her wealth and power, she looked like hell.

"You've changed, Reb."

"I've changed my mind."

"That surprises me more."

"He's the equivalent of a ten- or a twelve-year-old in a forty-three-year-old body. Even allowing for all that, he's not Archer."

"You believe in brain scans now?"

"Not just them. I found people who knew him at that age. They helped me duplicate his upbringing as closely as possible." Dimsdale could not guess how much that had cost, even in money. "They agree with the scans. It's not Archer."

He kept silent.

"How do you explain it, John?"

"I don't."

"What do you think of Bharadwaj's idea?"

"Religious bullshit. Or is that redundant? Superstition."

"When you have eliminated the impossible . . ." she began to quote.

" . . . there's nothing left," he finished.

"If you cannot think of a way to prove or disprove a proposition, does that make it false?"

"Damn it, Reb! Do you mean to tell me you're agreeing with that hysterical Hindu? Maybe he can't help his heritage, but you?"

"Bharadwaj is right."

"Jesus Christ, Rebecca," Dimsdale thundered, "is this what love can do to a fine mind?"

She overmatched his volume. "I'll thank you to respect that mind."

"Why should I?" he said bitterly.

"Because it's done something no one's ever done in all history. You cannot think of a way to prove or disprove Bharadwaj's belief. No one else ever has." Her eyes flashed. "But I have."

He gaped at her. Either she had completely lost her mind, or she was telling the truth. The two seemed equally impossible.

At last he made his choice. "How?"

"Right here at this desk. Its brain was more than adequate, once mine told it what to do. I'm astonished it's never occurred to anyone before."

"You've proved the belief in reincarnation. With your desk."

"With the computers it has access to. That's right."

He found a chair and sat down. Her hand moved, and the chair's arm emitted a drink. He gulped it gratefully.

"It was so simple, John. I picked an arbitrary date from twenty-five years ago, picked an arbitrary hour and a minute. That's as close as I could refine it; death records are seldom kept to the second. But it was close enough. I got the desk to—"

*•The body spasmed again—
and the eyes
opened. The nostrils flared
and drew in breath;
the chest expanded; the
fingers clenched
spasmodically. Rebecca
cried out . . .*

—collect the names of all the people who died at that minute!" he cried, slopping his drink. "Oh my God, of course!"

"I told you. Oh, there were holes all over. Not all deaths are recorded, not by a damn sight, and not all of the recorded ones are nailed down to the minute, even today. The same with birth records, of course. And the worst of it was that picking a date that far back meant that a substantial number of the dead were born before the brain scan, giving me incomplete data."

"But you had to go that far back," Dimsdale said excitedly. "to get live ones with jelled personalities to compare."

"Right," she said, and she smiled approvingly.

"But with all those holes in the data—"

"John, there are fifteen billion people in the solar system. That's one hell of a statistical universe. The desk gave me a tentative answer. Yes. I ran it fifteen more times, for fifteen more dates. I picked one two years

ago, trading off the relative ambiguity of immature brain scans for more complete records. I got fifteen tentative yeses. Then I correlated all fifteen and got a definite yes."

"But—but, damn it all to hell, Reb, the goddamn birthrate has been rising since forever! Where the hell do the new ones come from?"

She frowned. "I'm not certain. But I've noted that the animal birthrate declines as the human increases."

His mouth hung open.

"Don't you see, John? You're a religious fanatic, too. The only difference between you and Bharadwaj is that he's right. Reincarnation exists."

John finished his drink in a gulp and milked the chair for more.

"When we froze Archer, he died. His soul went away. He was recycled. When we forced life back into his body, his soul was elsewhere engaged. We got potluck."

The whiskey was hitting him. "Any idea who?"

"I think so. Hard to be certain, of course, but I believe the man we revived was a grade-three mechanic named Big Leon. He was killed on Luna by a defective lock seal, at the right instant."

"Good Christ!" Dimsdale got up and began pacing around the room. "Is that why there are so many freak accidents? Every time you conceive a child you condemn some poor bastard? Of all the grotesque—" He stopped in his tracks, stood utterly motionless for a long moment, and whirled on her. "Where is Archer now?"

Her face might have been sculpted in ice. "I've narrowed it down to three possibilities. I can't pin it down any better than that. They're all eleven years old, of course. All male, oddly enough. Apparently we don't change sex often. Thank God."

She looked him square in the eyes. "I've had a fully equipped cryotheater built onto this house. His body's already been refrozen. There are five people in my employ who are competent enough to set this up so it cannot possibly be traced back to me. There is not one of them I can trust to have that much power over me. You are the only person living I trust that much, John. And you are not in my employ."

"God damn it—"

"This is the only room in the system that I am certain is not bugged, John. I want three perfectly timed, untraced murders."

"But the bloody cryotechs are witnesses—"

"To what? We'll freeze and thaw him again, hoping that will bring him out of it somehow. From the standpoint of conventional medicine it's as good an idea as any. No one listened to Bharadwaj. No one's got any explanation for Archer's change. And no one but you and I knows the real one for certain. Even the desk doesn't remember." She snorted. "Nine more attempted defrostings since Archer, none of 'em worked and still nobody's guessed. There's a moratorium on defrosting, but it's unofficial. We can do it, John." She stopped, sat back

in her chair, and became totally expressionless. "If you'll help me."

He left the room, left the house, and kept going on foot. Four days later he reemerged from the forest, bristling with beard, his cheeks gaunt, his clothes torn and filthy. Most of his original disguise was gone, but he was quite unrecognizable as John Dimsdale. The security people who had monitored him from a distance brought him to her, as they had been ordered, and reluctantly left him alone with her.

"I'm your man," he said as soon as they had gone.

She winced and was silent for a long time.

"You'll have to kill Bharadwaj, too," she said at last.

"I know."

Rebecca Howell gazed again at the defrosted thing that had once been Archer Howell, but the torrent of emotions was tamed this time, held in rigid control. *It may not work on this shot, she reminded herself. I'm only guessing that his soul will have an affinity for his old body. He may end up in a crib in Bombay this time.* She smiled. *But sooner or later I'll get him.*

"Señora, it would be well to do it now."

The smile vanished, and she turned to the chief surgeon. "Doctor Ruiz-Sanchez, I said twelve hundred hours. To the second. You have made me repeat myself."

Her voice was quite gentle, and a normal man would have gone very pale and shut up, but good doctors are not normal men. "Señora, the longer he is on machine life-support—"

"HUMOR ME!" she bellowed, and he sprang back three steps and tripped over a power cable, landing heavily on his back. Technicians jumped, then went expressionless and looked away. Ruiz-Sanchez got slowly to his feet, flexing his fingers. He was trembling. "Si, señora."

She turned away from him at once, returning to contemplation of her beloved. There was dead silence in the cryotheater, save for the murmur and chuckle of life-support machinery and the thrum of powerful generators. *Cryotechnology is astonishingly power-thirsty, she reflected. The "re-starter" device alone drank more energy than her desk, though it delivered only a tiny fraction of that to the pineal gland. She disliked the noisy, smelly generators on principle, but a drain this large had to be unmetered. Especially if it had to be repeated several times. Mass murder is easy, she thought. All you need is a good mind and unlimited resources. And one trusted friend.*

She checked the wall clock. It was five minutes of noon. The tile floor felt pleasantly cool to her bare feet; the characteristic cryotheater smell was subliminally invigorating. "Maybe this time, love," she murmured to the half-living body.

The door was thrown open, and a guard was hurled backward into the room, land-

ing asprawl. Dimsdale stepped over him, breathing hard. He was wild-eyed and seemed drunk.

Only for the barest instant did shock paralyze her, and even for that instant only the tightening of the corners of her mouth betrayed her fury at his imprudence.

"Señor," Ruiz-Sanchez cried in horror, "you are not sterile!"

"No, thank God," Dimsdale said, looking only at her.

"What are you doing here, John?" she asked carefully.

"Don't you see, Reb?" He gestured like a beggar seeking alms. "Don't you see? It's all got to mean something. If it is true, there's got to be a point to it, some kind of purpose. Maybe we get just a hair smarter each time round the track. A bit more mature. Maybe we grow. Maybe what you're trying to do will get him demoted. I've studied all three of them, and, so help me God, every one of them is making more of his childhood than Archer did."

Her voice cracked like a whip now. "John! This room is not secure."

He started, and awareness came into his eyes. He glanced around at terrified doctors and technicians.

"Rebecca, I studied them all firsthand. I made it my business. I had to. Three eleven-year-old boys. Rebecca. They have parents. Grandparents. Brothers and sisters. Playmates, hopes, and dreams. They have futures," he cried, and stopped. He straightened to his full height and met her eyes. "I will not murder them, even for you."

"*Madre de Dios, no!*" Ruiz-Sanchez moaned in terror. The anesthesiologist began singing his death song, softly and to himself. A technician bolted hopelessly for the door.

Rebecca Howell screamed with rage, a hideous sound, and slammed her hands down on the nearest console. One hand shattered an irrigator, which began fountaining water. "You bastard," she raged. "You filthy bastard!"

He did not flinch. "I'm sorry. I thought I could."

She took two steps backward, located a throwable object, and let fly with it. It was a tray of surgical instruments.

Dimsdale stood his ground. The tray itself smashed into his mouth, and a needle-probe stuck horribly in his shoulder. Technicians began fleeing.

"Reb," he said, blood starting down his chin, "whoever orders this incredible circus, you and your stinking desk can't outwit Him! Archer died, eleven years ago. You cannot have him back. If you'll only listen to me. I can—"

She screamed again and leaped for him. Her intention was plainly to kill him with her hands, and he knew she was more than capable of it, and again he stood his ground.

And watched her foot slip in the puddle on the floor, watched one flailing arm snarl in the cables that trailed from the casing of the pineal restarter and yank two of them

loose, saw her land facedown in water at the same instant as the furiously sparking cables, watched her buck and thrash and begin to die.

Frantically he located the generator that led the device and sprang for it. Ruiz-Sanchez blocked his way, holding a surgical laser like a dueling knife. He froze, and the doctor locked eyes with him. Long after his ears and nose told him it was too late, Dimsdale stood motionless.

At last he slumped. "Quite right," he murmured softly.

Ruiz-Sanchez continued to aim the laser at his heart. They were alone in the room.

"I have no reason to think this room has been bugged by anyone but Rebecca," Dimsdale said wearily. "And the only thing you know about me is that I won't kill innocent people. Don't try to understand what has happened here. You and your people can go in peace; I'll clean up here. I won't even bother threatening you."

Ruiz-Sanchez nodded and lowered the laser.

"Go collect your team, Doctor, before they get themselves into trouble. You can certify her accidental death for me."

The doctor nodded again and began to leave.

"Wait."

He turned.

Dimsdale gestured toward the open cryotank. "How do I pull the plug on this?"

Ruiz-Sanchez did not hesitate. "The big switch. There, by the coils at that end." He left.

An hour and a half later, Dimsdale had achieved a meeting of minds with Rebecca's chief security officer and her personal secretary and had then been left alone in the den. He sat at her desk and let his gaze rest on the terminal keyboard. At this moment thousands of people were scurrying and thinking furiously. Her whole mammoth empire was in chaos. Dimsdale sat at its effective center, utterly at peace. He was in no hurry; he had all the time in the world.

We do get smarter every time, he thought. I'm sure of it.

He made the desk yield up the tape of what had transpired in the cryotheater, checked one detail of the tape very carefully, satisfied himself that it was the only copy, and wiped it. Then, because he was in no hurry, he ordered scotch.

When she's twenty, I'll only be fifty-seven, he thought happily. Not even middle-aged, it's going to work. This time it's going to work for both of us. He set down the scotch and told the desk to locate for him a girl who had been born at one minute and forty-three seconds before noon. After a moment it displayed data.

"Orphan, by God!" he said aloud. "That's a break."

He took a long drink of scotch on the strength of it, and then he told the desk to begin arranging for the adoption. But it was the courtship he was thinking about.

SAVE THE TOAD!

BY NORMAN SPINRAD

The past decade has seen a quantum leap in the ecological awareness of the American public, a new understanding that the planet belongs not only to humankind but to all creatures great and small, that the extinction of a species for the sake of human convenience is an ecocrime akin to genocide. The snail darter holds up a multimillion-dollar dam, humans risk their lives to save whales, and the FCC comes down hard on a comedian who tortured and executed cockroaches on the tube.

All well and good. But even in these days of ecocorrection a species of animal now faces extinction, a species that almost seems to have been designed by evolution as the ultimate test case of our ecological morality.

Valhalla is a retirement community on the east coast of Florida, not far from the Everglades, carved out of a fetid coastal swamp by an outfit called Development Unlimited.

A major selling point for the Valhalla development was a private, 18-hole golf course to be built on the premises, without the completion of which Development Unlimited would remain in breach of contract with its customers. After 17 holes were completed, it was discovered that what was to become the eighteenth and clubhouse green—a swampy pool overgrown with rotting palm trees—was the sole habitat of a hitherto-unknown species, the giant flying vampire toad.

The misnamed toad is actually a species of frog—a huge, wet, bile-green creature that can weigh up to ten kilograms. Translucent membranes of mucoid tissue are stretched between its fore and rear limbs like sails of bubbly slime, enabling it to glide for considerable distances from treetop perches, in the manner of a flying squirrel.

The giant flying vampire toad is the only frog with *teeth*. Two of them. Upper front incisors about five centimeters long, as sharp as hypodermic needles, and hollow. The vampire toad feeds through them. Truly a unique species.

But alas, at this writing, the poor amphibian seems marked for extinction. When it

was discovered that the Valhalla golf course was the sole ecological niche of the giant flying vampire toad, Development Unlimited signed a consent order with the EPA to redesign the eighteenth hole to incorporate and preserve its habitat as a swamp hazard.

A Pro-Am tournament was organized to test the course prior to occupancy of the condominiums. There was a strong east wind that day, and many golfers were hooking their tee shots into the swamp hazard on the eighteenth hole. Dozens of players invaded the habitat of the giant flying vampire toad.

The toad, we now know, hangs upside down in the tops of trees, cunningly camouflaged in the rotting foliage. It hangs there motionless like a huge glob of goo until some as-yet-unelucidated heat sense detects the presence of a large, warm-blooded mammal.

The crafty creature waits until the mammal has passed well by its perch. Then it releases its grip, extends its "wings," and silently zooms in on its prey from directly behind in a long, low glide out of the wooded gloom. Fangs extended, it pierces the back of the neck like a double-headed arrow with the full momentum of its dive. An instant later it plasters its slimy, sticky body in the prey's hair, grabs on to the ears with its clawed forelimbs, fastens its powerful, rubberlike suction mouth around the point of entry, and hangs there upside down, throbbing, slobbering, and sucking blood through its long, hollow teeth.

Unfortunately, this was not discovered until hordes of golfers emerged from the swamp hazard of the eighteenth hole shrieking, screaming, and trying in vain to pry blood-sucking frogs off the back of their neck with two-irons.

Development Unlimited applied for a variance from the Environmental Protection Agency in order to demolish the eighteenth hole swamp hazard and exterminate the giant flying vampire toad, claiming that the law was never meant to apply to a species that *ought* to be extinct. The EPA righteously rejected this vile suggestion, pointing out that it would inevitably lead to demands to exterminate other scientifically

unique species of vermin, such as the cockroach, the rat, and the anopheles mosquito.

Faced with a dead loss on the now-unsalable Valhalla development, Development Unlimited sued the federal government for damages. Just as this precedent-setting case seemed destined for the Supreme Court, HUD—perhaps acting under indirect White House pressure—agreed to purchase the development as a pilot project for the nation's first retirement community for welfare recipients, who, it was pointed out, could be induced to occupy a luxury condo community *without* a golf course.

The golf course was closed, the development was occupied by nongolfing welfare recipients, and the giant flying vampire toad was saved from extinction.

Or so it seemed at the time. The population of giant flying vampire toads has now gone into a precipitous decline. The unseemly human hurly-burly of the welfare condos has driven away the species' previous natural prey, and the lack of golfers to replace these nonhuman prey species has once more driven the toad to the brink of extinction.

Only an aroused public can now prevent a hideous act of genocide-by-neglect. It's one thing to save lordly whales and cute little seals, but will the summer soldiers of ecological awareness summon the courage to rally behind a giant, flying, blood-sucking frog? Where do we humans presume to draw the line? The giant flying vampire toad is the ultimate acid test of ecological conscience. If this unique species is to survive, steps must be taken to secure a food supply for it.

Why not let welfare recipients use the condominiums and the golf course? Under the supervision of a golf pro and a doctor of course. The trifling amount of blood they would lose would be nothing compared to the benefits they would gain. It would be a symbiotic relationship.

Therefore, we say: Reopen the Valhalla golf course! Give housing and recreation to those most in need of them! And save the giant flying vampire toad!



GIANT ON THE BEACH

*There always seems to be at least one uninvited guest
at every cocktail party. Hal's was no exception*

BY JOHN KEEFAUVER

The cocktail party was well into its second hour when somebody out on the terrace noticed the naked black lying on the beach—not that anybody at first realized his size. It wasn't until someone, perhaps with fewer drinks in him, looked at the figure through binoculars and yelled, "God, look at the size of him!" that anybody learned of the hugeness of the man. Even after they'd all started down to the beach, carrying their drinks, laughing and chattering about how you never knew what Hal and Liz were going to do to make their party a winner, nobody had any idea who, or what, the black would be.

In fact, even when they could begin to make out how large the man was through the fog and drizzle, a few kept on laughing and making jokes about how Hal had really outdone himself this time, getting a mannequin that size made and hauled to the beach in front of their house and leaving

PAINTING BY DOMINIQUE PEYRONNET

it there. Even when everybody was huddled around the motionless form and could see that the enormous figure was human and had apparently drowned—or at least was unconscious—there were still a few of the drunker ones who refused to believe it and who continued giggling. That Hal! Of course, those who knew him at all well knew he would never put a black anything anywhere near his house.

The figure was at least twice the size of a regular man—perhaps larger. And in proportion. There was nothing misshapen or ugly about him. He wasn't bloated. If anything, he was a handsome black, in his early twenties, and with a smile—a big smile. It was the smile that made some of the revelers think at first that he was just sleeping—that and the fact that he was lying on his back. But when he was yelled at and shaken, he didn't show in any way that he was alive, and everybody finally decided that he had drowned and had been washed up onto the shore, since he was right on the ocean's edge. However, there was one drunk who said he still thought that Hal and Liz were putting them on. "They hired him from some circus," he said. He wobbled over to the black and, almost losing his balance, put his lips close to his four- or five-inch-long ear and yelled, "Time to get up, the show's over!"

A few scoffed at him, but by this time mostly everyone had sobered up enough to realize what was going on, especially after Hal and Liz kept saying—swearing—that they hadn't had anything to do with it. Hal, in fact, was mad—damn mad—about it. "Goddamn nigger, on my beach!" he kept exclaiming. "Next thing you know they'll be right in the house!" Then when he was the first to say that somebody ought to call for an ambulance, a lot of his guests were surprised, until they heard him say that that would be the quickest way to get rid of the man.

Hal must not have realized that the black was way too big to fit in an ambulance. Two or three guests said that they ought to get some blankets to put over him. (Hal had thrown his coat over the black's privates right away.) The blankets would have to be gotten from Hal and Liz's house, of course, since nobody else lived as close to the beach as they did—not that anybody expected Hal to do it. But Hal immediately put his drink down and, with George Bascomb tagging along, ran off to his house. He yelled back, "I'm going to phone the cops!" and he added that he was going to get something more suitable to put over the black's private parts.

As soon as Hal left, Hank Martin lowered his ear to the black's chest and listened for a heartbeat. "Hear anything?" someone asked him. He said he didn't; he said the body wasn't even warm.

"No telling how long he's been lying here with nobody knowing it," Hank said as he began to press on the man's chest, attempting to give him artificial respiration. Others agreed, considering that no one

else was likely to be out walking on the beach in such weather (and no one was out walking now, that was for sure); moreover, nobody was apt to notice the body from a house farther along the shore because of the fog and drizzle and near darkness. Just by luck nosy Phil had seen him from the terrace. Who knew how long he'd been in the ocean? It was really cold this late in the year. (Everybody by now was assuming that he'd definitely been washed ashore.)

"Aren't you supposed to turn them over when you give them artificial respiration?" Liz asked Hank.

"Not anymore," he said. "I doubt if I could turn him over, anyway."

After a minute or so during which the black showed no sign of life, somebody said, "Breathe in his mouth, Hank," but Hank didn't want to do that. He didn't do it, and he didn't say anything. He just kept on pressing on the man's chest. Every once in a while he'd say, "No telling how long he's been in the water."

Wasn't a blemish on
his skin. . . . Considering how
good he looked—
healthy—it was hard to
think of him as dead,
especially with that smile,
which he never lost;
it was almost a laugh.

Apparently he hadn't been in the water long enough, though, for the fish to get to him; there wasn't a bite on his body that anybody could see. Wasn't a blemish on his skin, although Hank did say that he seemed to have some sort of small cut on his face but that it was too dark now for him to see it clearly.

Considering how good he looked—healthy—it was hard to think of him as dead, especially with that smile, which he never lost; it was almost a laugh; you could see his teeth even in the near darkness. It was eerie. "Can you keep a smile after you're dead?" somebody asked softly. Nobody really knew, but they assumed you could, for there wasn't a sign of life about him, no matter how good he looked.

By this time the man who had yelled, "Time to get up, the show's over!" kept looking back to the house. His glass was empty, and the black was dead. Before he headed back to the house, he said, "Maybe it's lucky for us he's dead, big as he is."

Of course, there had been talk about his size. Whether he was alive or not was, in a way, secondary to his size. After all, you could understand how somebody might

drown, but how could a person his size—at least twice as big as anybody else they had ever seen—exist? "Especially in this neighborhood," Hal had said before he went to the house. He meant a black in this neighborhood, not that that had anything to do with it. (Some thought then, anyway.) Whether the neighborhood was all-white or not had nothing to do with his size, a couple of the soberer ones pointed out.

Others, though, who knew Hal better, weren't so sure; they said that the very size of the black made the whole thing somewhat rational from Hal's standpoint, considering what he'd said all his life about blacks, not that he called them by that name, of course. And it was common knowledge what he'd done after he'd found out about that voodoo place some people had tried to start not far from his house a short time ago. There had been talk of shootings, not to mention the fire, but Hal, as usual, had come out of it smiling. Anyway, the longer the black lay there without a sign of life, the wilder the theories got, even if what was said was mostly joking—if that's what it was. There were a lot of nervous chuckles every time somebody said where he thought the giant might have come from. Flying saucers were even mentioned.

By the time Hal and George returned from the house the drizzle had turned into a steady rain. Hal said he'd phoned the cops and that they were calling an ambulance. He had brought a couple of blankets back to cover the man. When Hank put the blankets over him, end to end, they just barely covered him.

Everyone simply stood around in the rain then—those who hadn't gone back to the house already, that is—until Hank said, "If you all want to go back to the house, I'll stay here until the cops come. No use everybody getting soaked."

So everybody who was left, except for Hank and Hal, started back to the house, carrying their empty glasses with them. Then Hal decided he'd go back, too, saying, "I'm not about to get wet because of a dead nigger."

Hank thought he saw one of the blankets move above an arm (he was later to say). Then he heard what might have been a voice. It might have been the wind, though, and in such darkness who could be certain the blanket had moved?

But when the blanket moved again—either from the wind or from the giant—Hank started to walk to the house. There was nothing he could accomplish by staying by the body, and he needed a drink.

He had gulped one drink and was starting another when a patrol car and then an ambulance pulled into Hal's driveway. Hal and George Bascomb and a few of the others led the cops and the ambulance attendants down to the beach. Most of the guests remained in the house, including Hank. At that point he hadn't told anybody about the blanket's moving or about the

voice he had heard. He didn't want to be laughed at.

When the search party got to the water's edge, the black was gone. Hal was sure they were at the precise place where he had been. The blankets were still there.

The sky was clear when Hal awoke and, still in his pajamas, went straight to the terrace. They hadn't been able to find the black anywhere on the beach the night before, nor could they find any large footprints, and the ambulance attendants had finally driven away after making some comments about how booze affects not only the eyes but the brain as well. The cops had dutifully taken down Hal's story, along with Hank's words about seeing the blanket move and hearing what might have been a voice. All of this had added up to a poor night's sleep.

He saw the black as soon as he stepped outside. Although the figure was still on his back, and naked, he was now lying at a point about halfway between the house and where he had first been seen at the ocean's edge. He seemed to be still smiling, although Hal wasn't certain because of the distance. The black looked larger now, however. But Hal thought the increase in size was attributable to the light.

Hal was trying to decide whether to go down to him at once or first phone the police when he saw the second black giant. He was also on his back and naked and in the same place where the first one had been seen the night before, and he seemed to be of the same size as the other. Hal couldn't tell whether he was smiling, but for some reason he had a strong feeling that he was.

Then he saw a third giant, also naked and also black, wash in from the Atlantic. He floated ashore on his back very near the other one, and he just lay there—smiling?

He's resting, Hal suddenly thought. Of course.

A movement brought his eyes back to the black midway between the ocean's edge and the house. The man was sitting up, and Hal could now see that he was not the same black he had seen the night before, even though he had a smile.

Hal had turned and was sprinting for the phone inside when he saw the giant black hand come over the terrace wall. Then he saw the man's face rise over it, too. It was the black he had seen the night before. He was sure of it, even though now he saw for the first time, in the early morning light, that the man had parallel rows of tiny, knife-thin scars on each cheek, and now the giant was speaking angry, unintelligible—voodoo?—words, and not smiling anymore.

As the black crested the wall, Hal found himself crazily thinking in one terrible moment before the giant was upon him of those words he'd said all his life, "The god-damn niggers are getting too big for themselves."

STRIKE!

BY ISAAC ASIMOV

In 1976, the doctors of Los Angeles went on strike and stayed on strike for five weeks, abandoning their patients to the mercy of natural recovery.

The weekly death rate in Los Angeles promptly dropped from 19.8 deaths per 100,000 to an average of 16.2 per 100,000 during the strike-bound five weeks. When the doctors went busily back to their stethoscopes and tongue depressors, the weekly death rate promptly jumped to an average of 20.4 per 100,000 over the next five weeks.

The most likely reason for this decline seemed to rest in the elimination of elective surgery (the kind a patient wants for the fun of it). Doctors denied this. They said at least part of the drop was due to the elimination of necessary surgery (the kind a doctor wants for the fun of it).

This is an actual well-documented event because it happened in Los Angeles. Similar events (the actuality of which we cannot guarantee) can be discovered by an assiduous combing of small-town newspapers.

Knothole, Tennessee, June 25. The police strike that has lain like a pall on this fair town is now in its sixth week. Nowhere is a patrolman to be seen; the police cars languish in their garages.

And the crime rate is way down. Joshua Fondue of the Citizen's Action Committee put it this way: "We get indoors right after sunset. That way there's no mugging, and with all of us right here with our baseball bats and switchblades there are no break-ins. And that means you, buster; I don't care if you do say you're a reporter. Just stay on your side of the door."

Spike Gaultbate, three-time loser, agrees: "The police strike has eliminated strolling beneath the stars. It deprives the citizen of beauty; it deprives us of their skulls or wallets, whichever is thicker."

Hardbit, Vermont, July 18. The town of Hardbit has not seen a piece of mail move in two months, as the local postal employees, all veterans of the Lebanese Occupation of 1958, declared a Perpetual Veterans Day. "I repeat that this is not a strike," said Ehrlich O'Konski, head of the local postal union. "We just don't work on holidays."

The divorce rate is, of course, way down. Hardbit lawyers are depressed, economically and emotionally.

Said attorney Geraldine Upanishad,

"It's obvious that the American husband and the American floozie are being deprived of their Constitutional right to write indiscreet letters for wives to find. If this vicious miasma of family peace keeps up, society will break down and, worse, lawyers will lose a lot of money."

San Juan de Las Troundup, California, November 17. Ten weeks after the start of school, there is no start of school as the teachers remain stubbornly on the picket line despite the offer to raise their salaries to the janitorial level.

Meanwhile, juvenile crime has dropped to a record low level. Jimmie ("Brass Knuckles") Hollering, age 12, shouted down to this reporter from his bedroom window, "We kids are sick of this strike. We ain't learning nothing. At school I could mark up the walls in my art class and break up the toilets so I could get learned-up about plumbing. I break one little toilet at home, my old man gets mad. I can't smoke in my stupid house. I can't look at dirty pictures. And I don't remember when I last had a chance to beat up a teacher. Beating up my mom ain't no fun. She's allowed to hit back."

North Nowhere, North Dakota, December 8. Carrier pigeons from South Nowhere, South Dakota, inform us that the second year of the town's newspaper strike has begun today, and there is no sign of a break in the stalemate.

Meanwhile, the report is that mental illness has fallen to a record low.

Marilee Menstrow, South Nowhere visitor, says, "There isn't any bad news going around. I guess there must be bad news out there somewhere, but it don't get to us. There's a rumor that Congress is back in session, and that upset some people—but we didn't know for sure. It could be all the Congresspeople died, and that thought cheered us up."

Psychiatrist Hugh Safreud agreed. "Oh, yes, it's a denial of reality that causes all this mental health. It's bad. It's distinctly unhealthy to be healthy. Possibly so for the patient. Certainly so for the psychiatrist. I understand that some psychiatrists in South Nowhere are keeping copies of *The New York Times* in their waiting rooms to maintain proper levels of anxiety. If the *Times* goes on strike, too, it may be the end for South Nowhere. They'll die of pernicious happiness."

*He was the first alien to appear on TV.
Ever. And his act really
set Jerry and the world on their ears*

THE LAST JERRY FAGIN SHOW

BY JOHN MORRESSY

The other networks were wiped out, and they knew it. After this there would be no more "Big Three." There would be only a single network, and Jerry Fagin would rule it like a king.

The others tried to put up a fight, of course. There are no good losers in this business. One network threw together a nude musical version of the *Kama Sutra*. Another did a live eight-hour report on torture and execution of political prisoners around the world. The PBS stations had the best solution: They reran the Fischer-Spassky match.

But only the Jerry Fagin show could offer a real live honest-to-H. G. Wells alien from outer space as a guest. The projected audience was 99.3 percent of all potential viewers. It was figured that 0.4 percent would tune in to the other networks purely out of habit, and the remaining 0.3 percent would be watching

their own canned reruns of *The Lawrence Welk Show*.

Given Jerry's personality and the nature of the television industry, the wipeout was inevitable. A cage of tigers can be pretty impressive, but if you drop a gigantic dinosaur into the cage, the tigers all of a sudden turn into pussycats. And Jerry Fagin was looking like a very big tyrannosaurus rex. He had been one all along, but he kept the fact hidden. Most people thought he was a pussycat. Those of us who knew better said nothing—and kept our jobs.

Jerry Fagin was a funny man, as everybody knows. He had half a dozen foolproof comic characters, but he didn't really need any of them. He could stand in front of a camera deadpan, hands in his pockets, looking up at the ceiling, and reel off a monologue that had everybody helpless with laughter. He was born with pure comic instinct. At a party

I've seen him zero in on the one person out of, maybe, two hundred total strangers who could feed him perfect straight lines.

Jerry was probably the funniest man I ever worked for, and I've worked for them all. Along with all the funny he had a streak of pure killer. But Jerry had talent, and, more important, he had luck; so the killer side hardly ever showed. He always seemed to be on the scene at the right time or to know just the right person and have something on him.

So he wound up, at twenty-nine, hosting *Late Night Live*. At thirty, he was the hottest thing in the industry. The *Late Night Live* title was forgotten. Everybody called it *The Jerry Fagin Show*.

Jerry could play an audience like Horowitz playing the fiddle, or the piano, or whatever the hell Horowitz plays. You know what I mean. He took small-town talent-show winners

PAINTING BY DONALD ROLLER WILSON



and made them into stars with shows of their own. Just by holding up a book, he could turn a piece of schlock by an unknown hack into a best-seller. He could take a clubhouse errand boy and make him into a political figure. And he did. And they always paid.

The payoff was never in money. By this time Jerry wasn't worried about money. He wanted other things. He just hung in there and smiled and played kindly Uncle Jerry until he needed a favor. He never had to ask twice. Everybody knew that what Jerry Fagin had built up overnight he could tear down just as fast.

When the alien ship landed in Washington, Jerry counted up his I.O.U.'s and decided that it was pay-up time. He must have called in every one he had to get that thing on his show, but he succeeded. At the personal request of the President, no less.

The alien was called Twelve. He came from a planet with a name that sounded like cowflop being tossed into a mudhole. Some White House speech writer tagged it Brother Earth, and that was the name that stuck, over the protests of the enraged feminists.

Twelve looked like a human being designed by a committee and built by nursery-school dropouts. He seemed to have started out to be symmetrical, but missed. Two arms and two legs, like us, but they were of different lengths and thicknesses and set just a bit off center. Body lumpy as a potato, with a smaller potato for a head. Two eyes, a nose, and a mouth, but they moved around like the features of a melting snowman. Above one eye was a shiny spot. Twelve called it the weiox and tried to explain its function. No one understood a damned thing he said about it. They figured it was some kind of ear and let it go at that.

Aside from his weiox and a few other small details, mostly internal, Twelve made himself pretty clear right from the start. It turned out that he had been orbiting Earth for the last sixty-three hailumes, which was somewhere around twenty-seven of our years. All that time he was monitoring our broadcasts. And since most of his source material was supplied by television and radio, he had picked up a peculiar view of humanity.

For one thing, I think Twelve never really grasped the fact that there's a difference—most of the time, anyway—between a sitcom rerun and the *Eleven O'Clock News*, or an old Cagney movie and a junk-food commercial. They were all new to him, and all equally real. Or unreal. Or whatever.

Twelve's civilization had no word for entertainment. The concept simply did not exist for them. They did have some kind of music, but it wasn't an art form; it was a part of their digestive process. And that was all. They had no drama, no literature of any kind, no art, and absolutely no sense of humor.

They didn't have wars, either, and Twelve didn't seem to know what weapons were for. So everyone breathed a lot easier.

Now, it was clear to me that if you're going to interview something like Twelve on television, live—before the biggest audience in history—you go get Seavard out of retirement, or you hunt up a Lippmann or a Cronkite or somebody serious like that. You want the kind of people who cover elections and moon landings. You don't want Jerry Fagin.

But nobody asked me. Jerry Fagin landed the alien and scheduled him for a Friday night show. Then he sat back, read the headlines, listened to his telephones ring, and gloated.

I watched the show by myself that night, and I certainly didn't gloat. I had been alone most of the past month, ever since Jerry dropped me from his staff, loudly and publicly. In this business there is nobody as untouchable as a loser, and an out-of-work

● The alien was called Twelve . . . from a planet with a name that sounded like cowflop being tossed into a mudhole. Some White House speech writer tagged it Brother Earth, and the name stuck. ●

comedy writer is a loser of the *Hindenburg* class.

So I settled in, hoping to see Jerry screw up and blow his big moment and knowing all the time that no matter how big a son of a bitch Jerry Fagin might be, he was a pro and this would be the show of his career. But I could hope.

At the same time I didn't want to see Jerry completely wrecked, just badly damaged and requiring some repairs. Humiliation and disgrace were fine, but I didn't want him ruined. He was still my best potential source of income, and I was starting to feel the pinch. Trouble tonight, and Jerry would be calling me back, asking me to polish up some of the failure-proof routines that had helped put him where he was. And I'd be there. I was not about to turn down the best-paying job in the business just because Jerry had made me look like a fool in public and closed every studio door to me. I mean, I have my pride, but I have my bills, too.

I started watching early, so I could savor the full hype. Spot announcements every fifteen minutes. On the *Seven O'Clock*

News, a special five-minute report on the universe. At eight, ninety minutes of interviews with astronauts, starlets, clergymen, science-fiction writers, senators, a rock group, and the president of the Descendants of Prehistoric Alien Visitors. During the nine-thirty commercial interlude—toothpaste, deodorants, and detergents hawked in skits starring, respectively, teen-agers and aliens, secretaries and aliens, and housewives and aliens—I started drinking. I could tell it was going to be better than a one-bottle night, and I wanted to start early and avoid having to rush things later on.

After the barrage of commercials came a special one-hour feature on alien visitors as depicted by Hollywood. Sixty minutes of blobs, globs, bugs, slugs, crawling eyes, brain-eaters, body-snatchers, mind-stealers, worms, germs, robots, and androids, and every ten minutes a screaming reminder of tonight's once-in-a-lifetime *Jerry Fagin Show*.

What kind of impression all this was supposed to make on Twelve, I could not imagine. Maybe they made sure he was nowhere near a television set.

At ten-thirty, a longer, louder announcement. Then, after the mature-viewer commercials—wine, tampons, and laxatives peddled, respectively, by diplomats and aliens, female skydivers and aliens, and grandmothers and aliens—a half-hour special to remind the viewer who might have forgotten that there are nine planets in the solar system, that we are but a grain of sand on the shore of the great ocean of infinity, and so on. Very profound stuff, delivered like *Sermonette* or an insurance commercial. I kept on drinking.

Eleven o'clock brought the traditional mix of news, commercials, and station ID, and then, at eleven-thirty, came *The Jerry Fagin Show*. It was presented like the Second Coming.

The familiar Jerry Fagin theme was gone, and so was the studio orchestra. In their place was a selection from *The Planets*, performed by the Hollywood Symphony and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Billy Bragg, Jerry's apple-cheeked, white-haired butterball of an announcer, did no clowning on this sacred night. He marched on camera with the step of a man in a college commencement procession. He was in white-tie and tails. I took another big drink.

As I should have anticipated, Jerry was playing with his audience. After the solemn buildup, the show opened with a young comic. Billy appealed for a big hand for the kid in his first TV appearance, and the poor jerk—his name was Frankie Mars, for God's sake—came on and did a monologue about aliens landing in Brooklyn. It was the thirty-first one I'd heard since Twelve's arrival. There were alien-and-Puerto Rican jokes, alien-and-cop jokes, Jewish mother-and-alien jokes. I found it all very cozy and familiar. I had stolen a lot of

those very same gags for my early sketches.

The comic died, and he was followed by a singer who did a new number written in honor of Twelve. The only lines I can remember are "The whole room rocks, and I shake in my socks, when you jiggle your eyes and wink your weiox." The rest was a lot worse.

The singer gave it all she had, but she went down like the *Titanic*, same as Frankie Mars. Scattered applause from three relatives in the studio audience, silence from everybody else. The entire home audience was either in the bathroom or at the refrigerator. Comics and singers they could get anytime. What they wanted was Jerry and his guest.

That was a distinct Jerry Fagin touch. Subtle and deadly. I could picture him setting it up: the Uncle Jerry smile and "This will be the biggest audience in history, and I'm going to give some new talent a chance." And it's not until they're on camera that the new talent realize that they couldn't hold this audience if they stripped naked and sacrificed themselves to a trash compactor. I wondered why Jerry had picked this particular comic and this particular singer to destroy. Probably an interesting story there if I could dig it out. I drank to their memory.

Jerry sauntered on camera, white-tie and all, and was greeted with five solid minutes of uproar. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking humble and saintly, and when the noise died down, he made a little speech in which he used the words *honor* nine times and *privilege* eight. *Grateful* came up eleven times. In just over a minute.

Then Twelve appeared at last. I turned the welcoming ovation low and took a good look. He moved smoothly for something as lopsided as he appeared to be. The lumpy, grayish-brown plastic sack that covered his pale body didn't help his looks much. He looked like something that stepped off the cover of a cereal box, and those wacky, wandering, off-center features were halfway between a nightmare monster and an idiot mask.

I turned up the sound. The people in the audience were still applauding wildly, and Jerry let them go on. But when someone whistled, Jerry held up his hands for quiet. Twelve's eyes and nose moved around a little and then were still.

"Our guest has requested one courtesy," Jerry said. "Whistling sets up a painful feedback in his communication apparatus; so I must insist that no one whistle during the show."

"Thank you, Mr. Jerry Fagin," said Twelve. His voice rolled out in a deep, gluey flow, like gravel being tumbled around in syrup.

"Thank you for consenting to appear, on our show, Mr. Ambassador. It's a great honor," Jerry said.

Once Jerry got started thanking, he

couldn't stop himself. He thanked the President, Congress, the armed forces, the American people, the audience, the network, his friends, his sponsors—individually, by name—his parents, and his current wife, then went on to thank the rulers of Twelve's planet, the spaceship industry there, and everyone else—right down to Newton, Galileo, and Einstein—who might possibly have had a bearing on Twelve's appearance here. The only name he didn't drop was God's. Maybe he should have thrown that in.

Finally, after all the preliminaries and all the back-patting, Twelve got his chance to speak. This was the big moment, the message to humankind from outer space, the voice from the stars. Everyone listened in absolute silence.

And Twelve was boring as hell.

It's ridiculous to think that someone who has actually crossed interstellar space with word from another world could be dull, but that's what Twelve was. He may have been dynamite on his own world, but on Earth he was a dud. It wasn't entirely his fault. In his monitoring he had picked up every cliché in the English language, and he was using all of them. That burbly voice didn't help, either.

By the time Twelve had assured everyone that he looked upon his mission as a great and historic challenge, that he came in hopes of establishing a lasting friendship between our two great peoples, that a new

era in the history of the galaxy was dawning and he was proud and humbled to be given the chance to serve and so on and so on—it sounded as if he had memorized every campaign handout of the past forty years—Jerry could smell trouble. The studio audience was fidgeting noisily. People were coughing and shuffling their feet.

I caught the quick flicking of the eyes, the giveaway that Jerry was getting edgy. I could almost hear his brain going. Here was Jerry on the biggest night of his career, the biggest night in television history, and his guest was bombing. He could picture that audience of a hundred ninety-two million American viewers scratching their bellies and saying, "Hey, Honey, what do you say we switch over to the naked dancers on Channel 8?"

So Jerry made his move. If Twelve couldn't carry his weight as a guest, he'd just have to pay his passage any way he could.

Twelve was gurgling on, ending a long speech about interplanetary solidarity. I returned my attention to him. "... With shared hope for the future and with a deep and abiding faith in the basic decency and fundamental goodwill of the fine people of Earth that encourages me to predict a new age of brotherhood and justice in which races will ask not what the galaxy will do for their planet but rather what their planet can



"I'd like you to meet Dr. Modell, who's sending messages into space;
Dr. Kimbell, who's talking to dolphins;
and Dr. Klien, my husband, who's trying to communicate with me."

do for the galaxy," he said.

There was polite applause. Twelve looked pleased, but he wasn't in the business. The applause was the kind that sounds in every performer's ears like a death rattle.

"Gee, that's just the way my daddy used to put it," Jerry said, turning to the audience.

That drew the first laugh of the evening. Everyone recognized the tag line of one of Jerry's oldest characters, Dummy Lummo, the Clumsy Cop. It gave the audience something safe and familiar to deal with. They knew how to react now.

"But in a higher sense, this night represents only the beginning of what I venture to call the Galactic Age," Twelve went on, "for there is much to be done before we march together with arms linked in friendship and trust to meet the challenge of the future."

"That sounds mighty good, but we do it different back home," Jerry said.

The audience caught that one, too, and gladdened my heart. It was the tag line of my very own character, Elmo Klunk the Shitkicker Abroad. Elmo was one of Jerry's dependables, sure to make an appearance at least once every two weeks. The audience loosened up and laughed a bit louder, and longer.

I poured another drink, a bigger one, and edged forward on my chair. It isn't every night that you get to see an alien visitor turned into a stooge.

"We're honored by your tribute, Mr. Ambassador," Jerry said, "but I'm sure you understand our audience's curiosity about your planet and its customs. For instance, I'm told that you have no comedy on your world."

"It is correct, we have no comedy."

Jerry nodded sympathetically. "I've run into the same problem. You must need new writers."

I felt that one right between the shoulders. Welcome to Pearl Harbor; this is your host, Jerry Fagin. If my glass hadn't been nearly full, I would have thrown it at the screen.

Twelve, after a pause, burred, "It is correct, we have no writers."

"I'll let you have mine. You still won't have any comedy, but you'll be getting a great bowling team."

Again Twelve paused amid the laughter to evaluate Jerry's line and said, "I know this bowling that is the work of your Saturdays in the regressing hailumes. We have no bowling."

"No comedy, no writers, no bowling. Tell me, Mr. Ambassador, what do your people do for entertainment?"

"It is correct, we have no entertainment. I do not grasp the concept."

"It's simple. Entertainment is what you do when you're not working."

Twelve was silent for a longer time. Clearly he was having trouble with Jerry's lines, which weren't saying what they ap-

peared to be saying. The audience tittered with anticipation. Finally, in a gurgle that already sounded to me to be a bit defensive, Twelve said, "When we are not working, we sleep."

"Like all those people who used to watch the other networks. I see. But seriously, Mr. Ambassador..." And Jerry went on, a little faster now, confident, feeling the audience with him. They were laughing in the right places, waiting for the lines they knew he was going to feed his stooge from outer space.

Jerry jumped from topic to topic, always balancing the serious question with the quick punch line or asking a dumb question and then going statesmanlike, until the audience was helpless and Twelve didn't know what the hell was going on. Those syrupy responses came slower and slower. Each pause was longer than the one before. Finally, when Jerry got on the subject of reproduction, Twelve gave up completely and sat very still. Except for his eyes and nose and mouth. They were crawling around his face like flies trapped in vanilla pudding.

By now Jerry was sailing. The biggest audience in TV history was watching him, and he was showing them that nobody and nothing, not even a creature from another world, could top Jerry Fagin on his own show. I caught the wild, piercing gleam of ego in Jerry's eyes as he stood up, tousled his hair, and boomed out, "Well, I'll tell you the whole story, citizen, but you'll have to promise not to interrupt me. If there's one thing I can't stand, citizen, it's an interrupter."

He was slipping into a favorite character, Senator Wynn Baggs, the filibuster champion of Washington. The audience applauded and howled with delighted recognition as Jerry ranted on.

All this time Twelve sat like a statue, watching every move that Jerry made. He didn't look angry or insulted. At least, nothing on that Silly Putty face suggested irritation. As far as I could read him, Twelve was fascinated. It was as if he had Jerry under a microscope and couldn't believe what he was seeing. And Jerry ate up the attention like a kid with a hot fudge sundae.

Then Twelve threw up both his arms in a "Eureka!" gesture. I could almost see an old-fashioned light bulb go on over his head. For the first time that night his features stayed put. The audience got very quiet all of a sudden.

"This is a tohei-meiox!" Twelve announced suddenly, as if that explained everything.

Instinctively Jerry topped him. "If it is, you'll wipe it up. But I ought to warn you—the producer's wife loves it."

Twelve worked his face around into something like an untidy smile. "Now it becomes clear what is my role in this ritual," he said. His voice sounded a little less gooey.

When Twelve began to get up, Jerry had

the first whiff of trouble ahead. He bounced to his feet while Twelve was still halfway up, and with a big smile at his guest he said, "Thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for honoring us by consenting to appear on *The Jerry Fagin Show*. It's been a great pleasure and an exciting experience for all of us, and we're sorry you have to rush off, but we know how crowded your schedule is." Stepping to the forestage, Jerry began to clap. "And now let's have a big hand for the ambassador," he said to the delighted audience.

That didn't stop Twelve, who was acting like a kid who has just learned the facts of life. "In my ignorance I assumed that this was to be a hoeimeius encounter. I employed my fourth voice. Had I known that it was to be a tohei-meiox, I would have spoken thirdly. Please forgive me, Mr. Jerry Fagin."

On the last few words, as Twelve took his place at Jerry's side, his voice had changed completely. It was really weird. I wondered whether Jerry had somehow shocked the alien into instant puberty. In seconds Twelve had gone from that sumpy gurgle to a flat, staccato, nowhere-in-particular accent not a hell of a lot different from Jerry's.

"Please take my wife," he said.

Nobody made a sound. They probably all thought Twelve was going out of his head. So did I, for just an instant, and then I recognized that line and had my first clue of what Twelve was up to.

I didn't believe it. It was too crazy. But when Twelve wobbled his face a little—just a little, very nervously—it all became clear: He was mugging for a laugh. This crazy-looking thing from outer space that couldn't even get a four-word one-liner straight was trying to be a stand-up comic. I felt kind of sorry for the poor blob. Imagine coming all that way and bombing on your very first appearance.

What I didn't know at the time was that Twelve learned fast.

"Thanks again, Mr. Ambassador," Jerry said, edging away. "You've been a wonderful guest, and we hope you'll visit us again whenever your demanding schedule permits."

"It's a pleasure to be here, Jerry," Twelve said, stepping in front of his host, talking directly to the audience. "I would have been here earlier, but there was a holdup in traffic. I stopped for a light, and two men held me up." He did a quick jerk of his features—eyes left, nose right. The audience laughed. They were cautious about it, but they laughed.

"We're all sorry to hear that, Mr. Ambassador. And now our next guest, the well-known—" Jerry started to say, but Twelve went right on.

"The producer took me to dinner at this place on Fifty-fourth. The salad wasn't bad, but I didn't like the little men in loincloths who kept dipping their arrows into the Russian dressing."

"—Well-known star of stage and screen

who for the past three seasons has been delighting viewers with her portrayal—" Jerry tried again, louder, pushing in front of the alien.

Twelve rolled his eyes in opposite directions and blinked his weiox. "I asked the waiter if the lobster Newburg was any good. He said, 'Where did you see that on the menu?' I said, 'I didn't see it on the menu. I saw it on your tie.'" The audience laughed harder and longer this time. They liked him.

Shoving Twelve aside, Jerry snarled, "This lovely and talented lady who has won the hearts of millions of viewers with her portrayal of the zany, lovable Mrs. Pregnowski in—"

Twelve reeled, staggered back, waved his arms, did a flying leap into the air, and came down in a classic pratfall with a noise like a bagpipe assaulting a whoopee cushion. The audience went wild, applauding and cheering, drowning Jerry out completely. When Twelve climbed to his feet, his nose doing a back-and-forth crawl like a slow pendulum, he had to signal for quiet before he could be heard.

"The producer said, 'I hate to eat and run, but the way I tip, it's absolutely necessary,'" he said, spinning both forearms around like propellers.

The material was lousy, sure, but I could see that Twelve had a great natural delivery. With a good writer, he could go places. A show of his own, maybe.

What happened next, I will never believe was an accident. The camera cut to Jerry, purple-faced, restrained by four elderly security guards and a weeping producer. It held on the group. One hundred ninety-two million viewers heard Jerry scream, "Get that mush-faced interstellar son of a bitch off my stage! Shoot him! Drop a light on him! He's killing us!"

Which was an exaggeration. Twelve was doing wonders for the show. He was only killing Jerry.

We call the show *Twelve at Twelve* now, even though it still comes on half an hour before midnight. The producer felt that *Twelve at Eleven-thirty* would only confuse people.

But Twelve is a great guy to work for. It's a nostalgia trip just talking to him. During those years he was monitoring, he heard all the great ones—Berle, Gleason, Caesar, Groucho, Carson, you name them—and memorized every gag, every shtick, every bit of business. He just didn't know what the hell to do with his material until he saw Jerry putting it all together. Now Twelve is like a guy who's found his true calling. I think he's going to stay right here on Earth, and in the business, for good.

Twelve is also a very hard worker. He drops in every afternoon to run through the monologue for that night's show. We've already come up with some lines that everyone in the world recognizes. I've seen

"Well, wink my weiox" on everything from kids' lunch boxes to bikinis, and a day doesn't pass without my hearing someone say, "Please take my wife," and then seeing him collapse in hysterics. Even Henny Youngman used it when Twelve had him on the show as a guest.

We have a good running gag going on Twelve's dumb friend from home, Old Thirty-one. And if a line goes flat, all he has to do is jiggle his features and the audience breaks up.

He's even developing into a good impressionist. Some of his impressions are weird—he's the only one I know who does all the members of the Politburo while simultaneously trying to get a stuffed elk into a Honda—but his Jack Benny is nearly perfect.

What convinces me that Twelve is in the business to stay is that he's learned to be sincere. Two nights ago he graciously had Jerry back as a special guest to celebrate Jerry's new afternoon quiz show. They were hugging like a couple of high-school sweethearts.

Twelve was beautiful. A real pro. He ended the show by wiping his eyes, putting an arm around Jerry, and saying, "This crazy guy is my dearest friend on your whole wonderful planet. Everything I have, I owe to Jerry Fagin."

I could tell from Jerry's expression that he'd love to collect.

But my money is on Twelve.

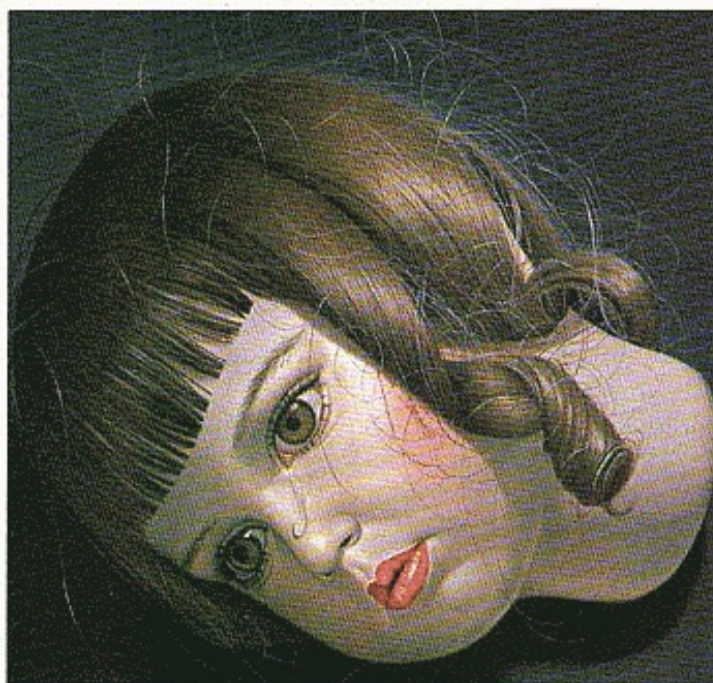




*Surrealistic images mirror
the Japanese predilection for science fiction*

EASTERN EXPOSURES

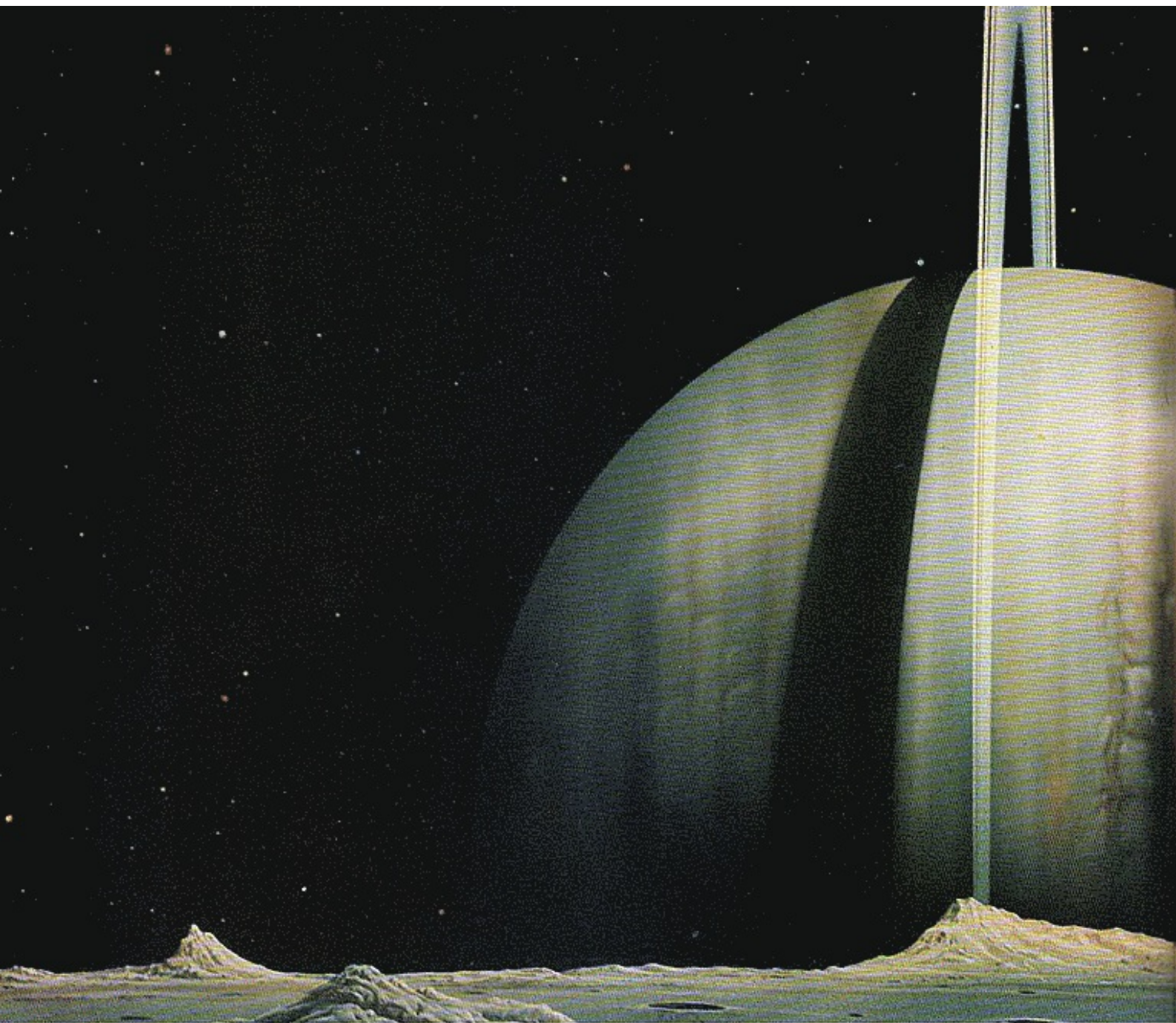
BY ROBERT SHECKLEY



Science-fiction publishing is booming in Japan and has established itself as a popular art form. This comes as no surprise: The many ancient Japanese legends are science fiction in all but the gadgetry, and there has been a strong taste throughout Japanese history for folktales of a fantastic and macabre nature. The jump to science fiction presented no difficulty for an audience that already had an established taste for the strange, combined with a strong inclination toward scientific achievement.

Science fiction proper began in Japan during the 1870s, when the country was undergoing violent modernization. Translations of Jules Verne's novels found an immediate and enthusiastic audience, and

Left and above: Haruo Takino's classic, Zen-like emphasis on visual simplicity creates a subtle stage for the high drama inherent in the new Japanese art.

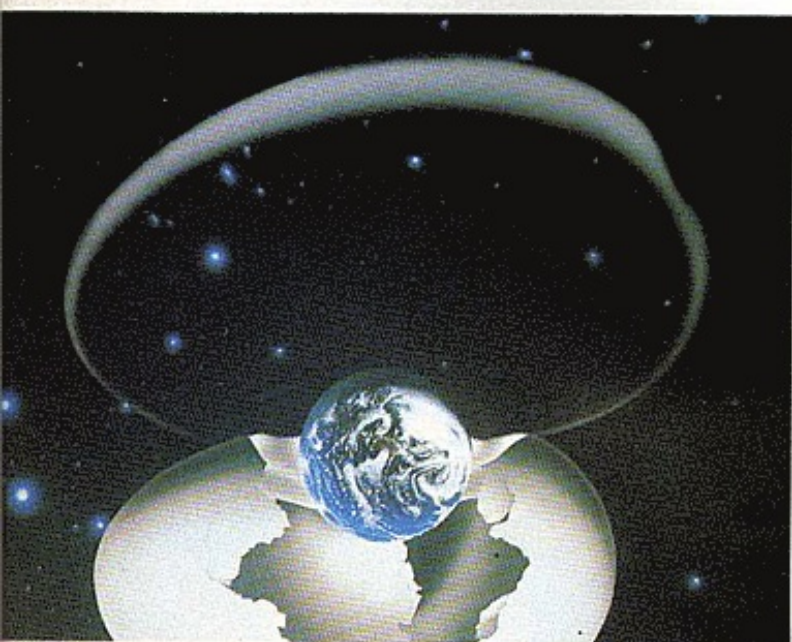
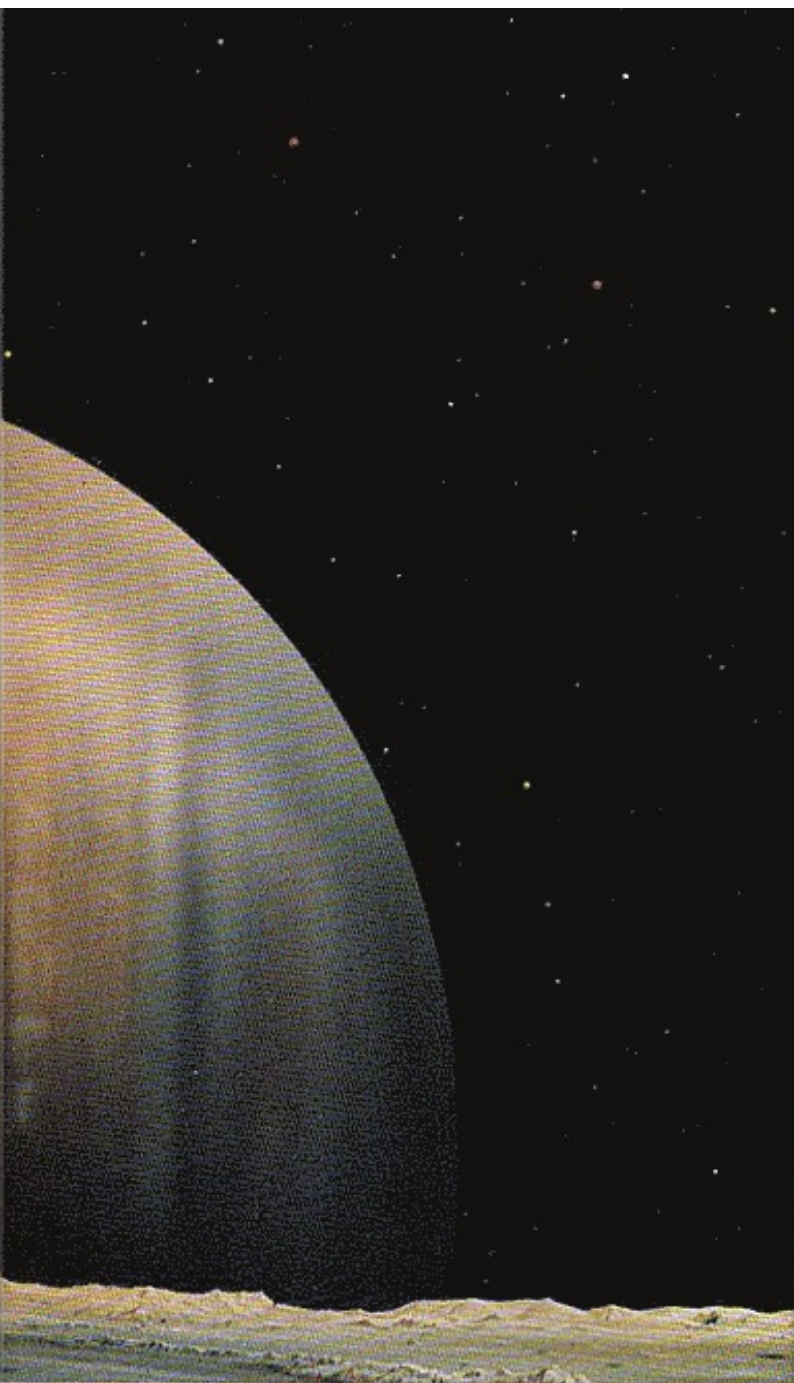


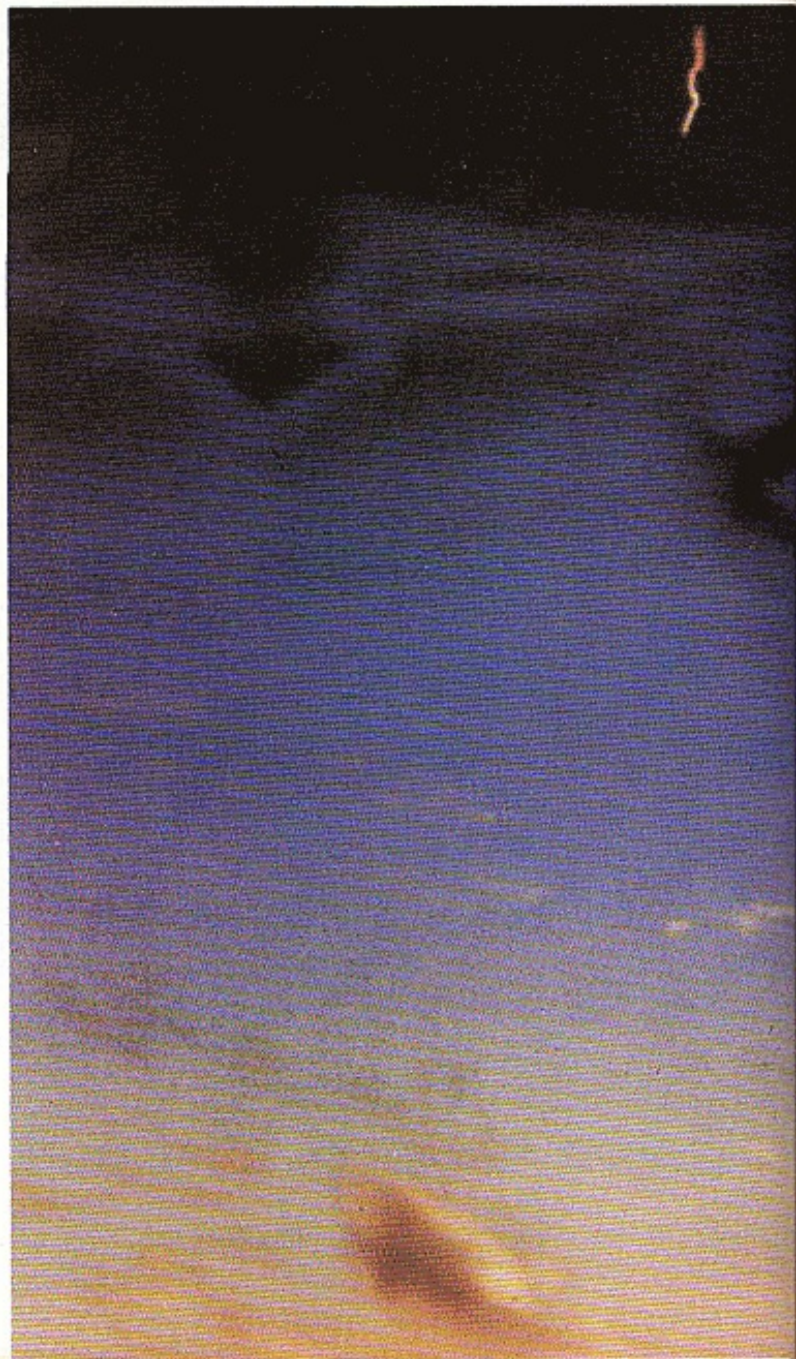
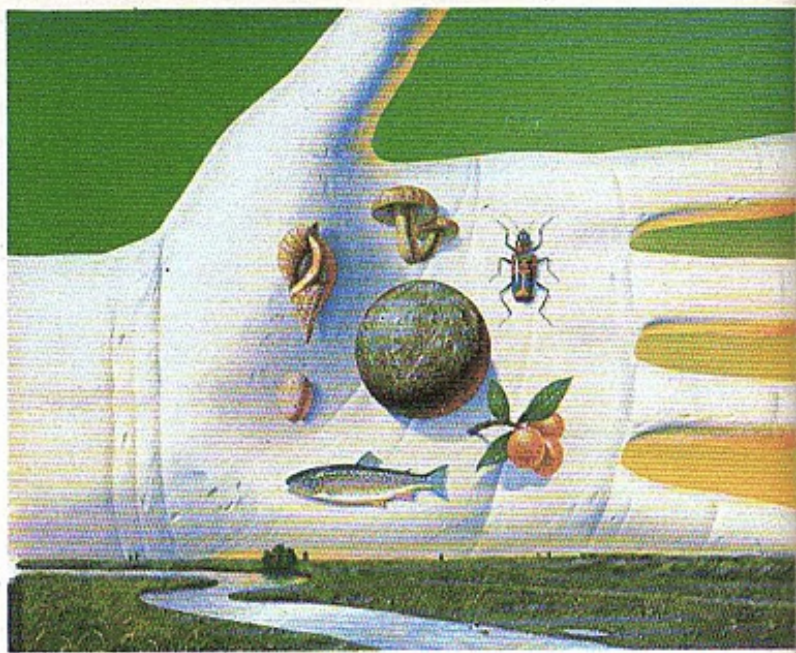
Verne's influence can be seen in early Japanese works. Shunro Oshikawa (1877–1914), known as Japan's first native science-fiction writer, wrote "Under-sea Battleship" in 1900, presenting a Captain Nemo of the Far East. Oshikawa's effort was prophetic, also, since it accurately predicted the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 and heralded a trend toward technological fiction.

Between the two world wars, native writers of science fiction and fantasy began appearing in print. But the form really took off after the Second World War. There were a number of elements that made up its popularity: a national predilection for novelty; the flood of science-fiction paperbacks left behind by the U.S. occupation forces; the effect of American technology upon a proud, resourceful, and ingenious people; and the innate Japanese taste for modernism. Of great importance also was Wernher von Braun's and Willy Ley's popular treatment of man in space in the early Fifties and Chesley Bonestell's artwork, with its widespread influence on young artists. These factors have made Japan unique among Far Eastern nations and have produced the country's extensive

● *The Japanese possess a unique ability to sharpen the perception of our highest technology.* ●

Clockwise, from left:
Kazuaki Iwasaki and
Ichiro Tsuruta, two
leading space artists;
astronomy and the sur-
real form a unique per-
ception of space for
Yoshihisa Sadamatsu
(below), Takuro Kamiya.





*Clockwise from right:
Junichi Ohka makes
liberal use of double
exposures (right and
above); the art of
Yû Kasamatsu (top left),
Natsuo Noma (top right)
reflects a fascination
with odd juxtapositions.*

● The Western seed of surrealism, planted in the Twenties, has blossomed into Eastern flowers. ●

publishing and movie interests in science fiction. Japan is the second-largest market for science fiction after the United States, according to Ken Sekiguchi, an editor who knows Japanese publishing. "There are five monthly SF magazines whose combined circulation is in the hundreds of thousands."

Between 1957 and 1974 the pioneering publishing firm of Hayakawa SF Series published 318 volumes of translations. Edgar Rice Burroughs, E. E. "Doc" Smith, and Robert A. Heinlein became the most popular English-language science-fiction authors. Today English translations are still widely circulated, but a number of native authors are also gaining prominence in the field. "Sakyo Komatsu, author of *Japan Sinks*, is the greatest science-fiction writer in Japan today," Sekiguchi declares.



OMNI

THE NEW FRONTIER



Three years ago OMNI magazine pioneered a revolution in science publishing, travelling to and beyond the known horizons of our world, returning with fascinating and fantastic stories, in language we could all understand. OMNI looked inside the atom and across the breadth of the universe, discussed black holes, dissected the human mind, searched for UFO's soberly and described genetic engineering simply. And OMNI continues to journey the new frontier—that space and moment straddling our incredible todays and our even more exciting tomorrows.

Read the philosophies and fiction of B.F. Skinner, Ray Bradbury, Carl Sagan, Frederik Pohl, Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Gerard K. O'Neill and Stephen King, and read about the scientists and their science, the architects of our future. Imagination is the soul of our civilization. OMNI is the magazine that best captures and reflects that spirit, that wonder, that imagination.